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WHEREAS I WAS BLIND

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C.B.E., M.P.

WHEREAS I WAS BLIND

by

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1

NEW WORLD

She tucked me up in bed, crossed quietly to the door, put out the light, and I heard the door click. I heard a board creak as she walked quietly along to her own room. Then there was silence.

She and I had been very much together the last few days, and I had got on her nerves, and she was very lonely. Her heart was in Turkey where her husband, Douglas Pass—my friend and cousin—whom she loved very dearly, had been a prisoner of war for more than a year. News of him was scarce ; there were reports from other wives of prisoners that hardships were being endured, cruelties inflicted, that reprisals for imaginary grievances against the English had been visited upon some. I was adding to her worries—I must be more agreeable tomorrow. I would go to sleep and feel better.

But for many nights I had not been able to sleep, at least not properly, and what rest I did get gave me no peace of mind. I crept out of bed, felt my way towards the end and across the room to the dressing-table. Groping about over my head, I found the electric-light bulb in its glass shade. It was cold. Of course it was cold—she had put out the light when she left the room. I fumbled my way gingerly across the room to the door. I found the electric-light switch and pressed it down, then back to the dressing-table—the bulb was now warm. I pulled it down to my face and pressed it to my eye, or at least to the place where my eye had been. The glow was pleasant and comforting ; it stimulated some nerve endings. Was that a glimmer of light ? Of course it wasn't, for that eye had been removed. And the other eye, what of that ? It had collapsed when the German bullet had entered my temple. Was that a glimmer of light ? was there a vestige of an eye left ? Of course there wasn't ; it was nonsense. I knew it would be nonsense, but I had for

some weeks decided that I must do this one night, when I was alone, when I would not be surprised by anyone entering my room, to make sure. I felt very guilty about it. I should have looked such a fool if anyone had come in and seen me.

Looking a fool! That was the worst part of blindness —or so it seemed to me then. And they would be sorry for me. The kindest people would be sorry for me. And I was sorry for myself. My God, what a sacrifice I had made, so light-heartedly, so cheerfully! And I was so young; only eighteen when that bullet hit me. And here I was out of the war, which I had trained for, for so long. Not only out of the war, but out of life. That was a dreadful thought.

I was in bed again, but I did not sleep, and there was nothing to do; I could not turn on the light and look around the room, I could not read a book, I could not ring for the night nurse who would come and talk to me and make a cup of tea—that at least was a solace and comfort in hospital. My bed, the most luxurious and comfortable that money could buy, seemed hard and uncomfortable and sweaty. Through the open window from across the park came the monotonous croaking of frogs down in the pond—the most monotonous noise I had ever heard in my life, almost menacing; it would drive me mad.

Why couldn't I sleep? Shattered nerves and overwrought imagination, I suppose.

I had many nights like this, and the days were nearly as bad. She did everything for me that could be imagined—read to me for hours, went for walks with me. I was in a comfortable home; there was a pianola, a gramophone, dozens of records; there were people around me I liked, and the servants were old friends of my boyhood. But everything tasted sour; it was not because the things were sour, but because I was sour.

After lunch she would knit stockings for her husband—would I hold the wool? I would, and I did—but what a job for a healthy fit young man, when others were fighting. She was preparing a little magazine to send to the wives of the prisoners in Turkey. She collected extracts from all their letters, and put them together in a sheet, which brought a

mass of information to each wife which she would not have got from her husband's letter alone. Would I learn to typewrite so that I could typewrite the wax for her from which the copies were made? Would I help to make the copies, by rolling the pieces of paper on the master with a rubber roller? No, I wouldn't do any of these things. The suggestion was only made because she was sorry for me, and wanted to occupy me. So I was annoyed with her and ungrateful. The truth is that I was annoyed with myself, and sorry for myself. What an impossible companion I must have been! How she must have despaired! But she stuck to her job, with understanding and generous sympathy, and it had a profound effect upon my after-life.

We read the Life of Henry Fawcett. Fawcett had been a scholar, a Member of Parliament, and became Postmaster-General in 1880, and he had been blind since he was a young man. He rode a horse; he was cheerful; he kept his clothes in good order, so that he knew where to find them. He walked about alone; he had succeeded in public life.

Then we went to Woolacombe for a change: there seemed always to be a beastly cold wind which hurt my wound. I put braille labels on my gramophone records—in hospital they had taught me the elements of reading with my fingers and I could read the name of the record. I had no sooner labelled them all than I was bored with them. I remember meeting Sir Frank Fletcher, the great Headmaster. He had been Headmaster at Marlborough where I had been to school before the war, though I had been just after his time. I remember asking him whether a blind man could be a schoolmaster (head of a school for the blind). I pictured myself organising the teaching of the blind. He encouraged me; he understood human nature, though he could have known nothing about this particular matter. I do not remember that Fawcett's Life or Dr. Fletcher had much influence upon me at the time, but it is strange that these two events should occur to me now as I write, and I do not doubt that they had an effect upon my future.

I went back to hospital—St. Mark's College, Chelsea, the 2nd London General Hospital, where most of the eye

cases were concentrated. It was now well on to September 1916, and I had been blind since the 23rd of July, when a bullet had knocked me over. I didn't think much about blindness when I was hit. I suppose I slept a good deal, and perhaps I was unconscious for a time, though I actually remember being tied up immediately after I was wounded, and I talked to my Company Commander as I walked down the line to a dressing station.

I remember being wheeled along on a stretcher—one of those flat things on a pair of wheels, rather like the barrows from which hawkers sell fruit. We seemed to go for miles down the Pozières-Bapaume road—a shell-swept road. I remember an injection of anti-tetanus serum, and the doctor marking a cross upon my forehead with indelible pencil. He told me about this ; it was a sign that I had been inoculated, so that the next doctor wouldn't do it again. I remember thinking that was rather funny.

Looking back now, after twenty-five years, I can only think of odd things that happened during these weeks—my cousin Lilia Howard who came out to see me, brought out by the Red Cross, because I was on the danger list, and who read to me for hours while I lay in the Casino at Le Touquet, which had been converted into a hospital. We read *Trent's Last Case*, and a jolly good book it was : the charming red-headed V.A.D. who nursed me—I suppose someone told me she was red-headed, but I knew she was charming without being told : the journey home in a hospital ship, across that fateful stretch of water : the English Channel, which six of us young subalterns from Sandhurst had crossed in the other direction only a few weeks before : the agent from Cox's Bank, who came and spoke to me as I lay in my bunk on the hospital ship, and asked me if I would like to send a telegram and if I wanted some money. He sent the telegram and gave me a few shillings. I could not sign a cheque, but I promised to pay, and I did pay. (I have banked with Cox's now merged in Lloyd's ever since.) The cheerful bustle at Victoria Station as people met the train and gave the wounded men chocolate and tea ; the hush and the drawing aside of the cheerful crowd as they saw my

stretcher lifted out, my face and head completely bandaged up. Then I was in an ambulance being driven through London in the early hours of the morning by a girl. Another girl sat in the back and held my hand.

I spent many weeks in London during this war, during the autumn of 1940, until my own house was bombed. I saw women in steel helmets, and without them, acting as air-raid wardens, or nurses, under the air bombardment of the enemy. This generation does not think it strange that women should take an active part, but before the war of 1914 a girl belonging to the genteel middle class was normally very severely protected. It was hardly nice for her to go out alone—her mother or a maid would go with her. Even when I went to France in the spring of 1916, it had not occurred to me that women would take an active part, and I remember being astounded when these two young girls drove me from Victoria Station to the hospital. Truly times have changed.

It was while I was in the Officers' Ward of No. 2 London General Hospital, still rebellious, that two things happened to me of the greatest importance. One was the visit of a girl who wore the smoothest and most beautiful kid gloves that I had ever felt, and the other was the letter she brought with her.

She was a V.A.D. who worked at St. Dunstan's as Arthur Pearson's personal assistant and guide, and it was he who had written me the letter. The letter told me how he had gone blind in middle life ; how he had made the best of it and had found much to do to interest him ; how other young officers who had been blinded before me had found useful things to do, and were happy ; how he had established St. Dunstan's to train blinded officers and men, and inviting me to go there.

I accepted the invitation, and entered a new world.

The lady with the gloves !—I fell in love at first sound of her. Her charm, her personality, her true sympathy. She is now my wife.

2

I WALK ALONE

So I went to St. Dunstan's, and a marvellous change came over me. It was partly that I was getting stronger ; partly the example and invigorating personality of Sir Arthur Pearson himself ; partly the example of other officers and men who had preceded me, and had settled down to a regular routine.

The attainment of a measure of independence in reading to myself and typewriting and getting about alone, and looking after my own personal needs, began to dispel some part of my despair. There were intervals of cheerfulness when the clouds would be dispelled and the sun would shine through, and one would forget the darkness. And there were times when irritation at the restrictions of blindness gave way to interest in the overcoming of them. The process was slow, and although a superficial happiness pervaded my mind, it was some time before contentment and peace of mind came to me. But looking back now on the early months of blindness I think more of agreeable companions and jokes and new experiences than of despair or loneliness.

In 1918 we were married—that was the beginning of a great and lasting happiness. In 1920 our only child, Jean, was born, with all the familiar anxiety and joy. In 1917 I had started work as Sir Arthur Pearson's assistant at St. Dunstan's. By 1921 I had become his second-in-command, and when he died at the end of that year I became Chairman of St. Dunstan's. I was twenty-four, and the responsibility of following him seemed to me a very great one. Though I knew something about blindness and about St. Dunstan's, I was woefully ignorant of the great world outside. I had already decided before Sir Arthur Pearson died that I must seek a wider outlet than any job at St. Dunstan's might afford and had started to interest myself in politics.

In 1922 I entered the London County Council ; in 1924,

Parliament. This had to be done with very little money, and that is what made it so difficult, and for that matter so interesting. However, one way and the other we managed, by a mixture of help, credit and faith, to keep going, and ten years later came my first invitation to join a board of directors. I had turned the corner and the going was easier. Now, in 1942, I am just beginning to reap the fruits of my labours and have a number of directorships. With taxation at the unprecedented levels of today I suppose I shall never make a fortune now, but since the second World War broke out there is no doubt that values have changed. And one is so thankful to be alive and well, to be taking part in the making of such momentous history, and to see our cause slowly but inevitably holding its own, and perhaps even beginning to prevail, that the importance which one used to attach to personal fortunes has receded to a better proportion.

Now I look back over twenty-five years of blindness and find myself writing a book, and I begin to wonder why. And I begin to ask myself questions about things that I have rather taken for granted. Am I happy? Are my blinded soldier comrades of the Great War happy? If so, how is that? and what is happiness? But before I try to answer these questions, let me attempt an answer to the previous one—Why am I writing this book?

I want to write a book for just the same reason as prompted me when I was a child to want to ride a horse; or later on when I was a boy, to want to drive a motor car; or later still, to want to fire a revolver or climb a mountain. It is, I think, the urge to do something which you haven't done before, and which you hope you may prove to yourself and to others that you are able to do. In the ordinary way I do not suppose I should have attempted to write this book until I was sixty-five or older and had retired from public affairs. I am moved to write it now when I am only forty-five because the outbreak of this war is already bringing some scores of young men, and women too, into this world of the blind in which I have lived so long. Their journey into the valley of the shadows, their quiet patient courage, their adaptability and their resurrection—for it is nothing less—

into the world of men and women moves me strongly, reminds me of my own experience, and makes me want to set it down, partly, I think, to ease my own mind and partly because I hope it will be helpful to them.

I have not discovered a new continent, or a new way of living ; I have not the aptitude nor the desire to write sketches of the great men I have met ; my life has simply been that of one of the small fry in public affairs, but it has been very interesting to me—the more so because I have had to find my own way of doing many commonplace things that seem easy enough to be taken for granted.

In the Great War, the centre of our organisation was at a house called " St. Dunstan's Lodge " in Regent's Park. The name " St. Dunstan's " is now so well known all over the world that some people think that the name itself was chosen to fit the organisation, and perhaps that St. Dunstan himself was Patron Saint of the Blind. This is not the case.

In fact St. Dunstan was Archbishop of Canterbury in 959. He was himself a craftsman, and legend has it that, in a fight with the devil, the saint pulled his nose with a pair of red-hot pincers. St. Dunstan's Villa was built during the time of the Regency about 1829. It was one of four houses or mansions built in the Regent's Park.

The Regent, who lived in St. James's Palace, had the idea to create a hunting park for himself, which was to include the present Regent's Park, Hampstead Heath, Parliament Hill Fields, Ken Wood, St. John's Wood, and all the ground between. There was to be a Regent's Way—a magnificent straight road leading from south to north, from St. James's Palace, up the present Regent Street, up Portland Place, up the Broad Walk of the Park. He bought the land for the Crown, including a wide strip to form the Regent's Way. He was an early town-planner, but Parliament didn't see as far as he did, or perhaps they didn't see the public interest that would be served, and thought he was only serving his own selfish interests ; at any rate they refused the money to develop this magnificent scheme. The Regent's Way was never made, and instead we had the narrow Regent Street, and the land on either side of it was let for shops. To this

day a shopkeeper having a lease of land on Regent Street pays a ground rent for the front part of his shop to the Crown, and leases the back part of his shop from some other landlord.

St. Dunstan's Villa was an old-fashioned house standing in about seventeen acres of ground, running down to Regent's Park lake. The famous clock from the church of St. Dunstan-in-the-West in the City of London, with its massive figures of Gog and Magog—splendid examples of the early clock-maker's art—who struck the great bell with their hammers to indicate the quarters and the hours, had been moved to this villa in 1830 by the 3rd Earl of Hertford, and the name had come with the clock. The original house has changed hands and been pulled down since we were there. Lord Rothermere was its owner at one time and he returned the clock to its old place outside the church of St. Dunstan-in-the-West in Fleet Street, where it is today.

St. Dunstan's had really started in a private house in Bayswater, but very soon the blinded soldiers numbered a dozen or more and had outgrown this. St. Dunstan's Villa, or St. Dunstan's Lodge as it had come to be called, was generously lent to Sir Arthur Pearson by Mr. Otto Kahn, the American financier, and St. Dunstan's Hostel for blinded soldiers and sailors was started there early in 1915.

There had been severe casualties during the first year of the war, and at Loos in 1915, but the original British Expeditionary Force had been very small by comparison with continental armies. Nevertheless by the time I came to St. Dunstan's in the autumn of 1916, there were already a couple of hundred blinded soldiers and sailors and ten or a dozen officers. The officers were accommodated in two houses in Portland Place, and it was to No. 21 Portland Place, where Sir Arthur Pearson himself lived, that I found my way about the beginning of October 1916. Although the officers lived separately and had their own mess, as is the case in the Army and in military hospitals, we underwent exactly the same training and re-education as the men. We used to go up each morning from Portland Place to Regent's Park to the schoolrooms and workshops there. Our first few months

were spent in learning to be blind—familiarising oneself with the day-to-day difficulties of blindness, learning to read braille, and to use a typewriter.

Perhaps the most irksome thing about blindness at first is the restriction of personal movement, the feeling that you have to rely upon someone else to guide you from your bedroom to the bathroom or to the dining-room, or even round your bedroom itself. Kindly nurses and orderlies give you every help, take your arm at every turn, and you have to make a personal effort to start off on your own. You probably begin in your hospital room, feeling your way round the beds, blundering across to your companion's bed to sit on it and talk to him. Then you take a stick and tap it to feel your way to the bathroom. Gradually you get a plan of the room, or the hospital, or the house, in your mind, and taking very small steps, waving your stick about in front of you in fear, and feeling that you look a fool, you acquire a clumsy confidence. Then you find that there is no need to wave your stick about in front of you, that probably you will hit somebody with it, or knock a vase over, and you begin to take pride in looking normal as you go about. At first your movements are almost entirely a question of feeling your way from one obstacle to another yard by yard. Then the sense of hearing and perhaps the sense of smell come to your aid ; instead of realising that you have come out of your room into the passage by feeling the doorway itself, you appreciate where you are by the sound, the echo down the corridor, the smell of cooking or of anaesthetics, or the change in the temperature. A combination of all these stimuli convey their story to your mind, and presently you visualise the surrounding in which you find yourself. You still have your stick, because it enables you to feel a little ahead when you want to, but instead of waving it about, you handle it as naturally as you can. You probably rub your hand along the side of the corridor to keep yourself straight ; you are still going along to a very large extent by feeling ; but soon you cease to do this, you cease to count steps, you walk with increasing confidence and an increasing air of normality.

After a time a new factor enters in—I call it a sense of

obstacle. It is not really a new sixth sense, but is a combination of hearing, smell, temperature, air pressure, and the power of visualisation. It is hard to describe exactly how you feel, but you begin to " see " in your mind's eye. Soon you do without your stick in the house, though you will always find it of great use when walking out of doors. You learn various little tricks, as for example, that the best way to protect yourself against a corner which you are approaching or an open door, is not to wave your arms about in front of you—this not only looks helpless and foolish, but is a trap, for while you are waving your arms about in front of you, the door will almost inevitably come between them edge-on and you will strike your face on it. If, on the other hand, you carry your arm just in front of the body, the forearm parallel with the ground, rather in the position of defence when boxing, and if you walk upright, the whole of your body and face will be protected by this arm, and should you run into the edge of a door or a corner you will be completely protected from a serious bump. You soon learn that the banister of a staircase might have been designed for the blind. It almost invariably follows the stairs in such a manner that it is a perfect guide—when it runs flat you know that a landing is coming ; when it turns, you turn ; when it comes to an end you look out for the top of the stairs or the bottom. Incidentally, the best way to guide or aid a blind man in showing him the way up or down stairs is simply to put his hand on the banister and tell him to follow that.

I well remember my first attempt to find my way about outside the house. It was rather difficult to get away, for although the V.A.D.s knew that it was good for us to learn to move about alone, they felt a considerable responsibility, and if you tried to go out of the house by yourself the chances were you would be spotted and intercepted. Then they would tell you—sweet girls that they were—that they were just going that way themselves, and couldn't they come with you ? So you took them down to the Langham Hotel and gave them a drink and came back again, and you'd had a jolly time, but you hadn't learned to walk alone.

However, one day I escaped, and finding my way out

of the front door into Portland Place turned to the left. I had learned, by talking to people about it, that if I proceeded for fifty yards or so I should come to New Cavendish Street, where I would turn left. If then I proceeded for two or three hundred yards I would come to Mansfield Street where I would turn left again along Duchess Street, and if I went on like this and turned left four times, I ought to have gone round the square and have come back to 21 Portland Place. How would I know when I got back? Well, leave that problem till it arises. So off I went with my stick, tapping the railing on my left, and presently the railing stopped. Here is New Cavendish Street, I thought, so I turned left; but I had made a mistake and I walked into the front door of a house—fortunately there were two or three steps up, and not down, and all I did was to blunder into them instead of falling down an area and breaking my neck. This all sounds very hazardous, but you've got to try it for yourself, there's no other way; and if you take care and walk upright, you'll probably not come to much harm. On one of these journeys I walked into the legs of a housemaid who was washing the steps, and fell over her bucket, but that sort of thing only occurs if you go out early in the morning.

Soon I had learned the way from Portland Place to St. Dunstan's in Regent's Park—a walk which took a sighted person about twenty minutes and took me about forty at first, though I reduced it to thirty later on. This involved crossing three or four roads, including the Marylebone Road, which even then was a very busy street. In those days there was a policeman at most busy corner, and this particular man got to know that we might be coming and used to show us across, or tell us when the traffic was at a standstill. Nowadays it's not quite so easy, because policemen have been replaced by automatic lights; but the light system usually leads to a number of people standing on the pavement waiting until the way is clear and then they all go off together, and a blind man will hear and feel what is happening around him by following the crowd and he will be all right.

Do not let it be imagined that I am encouraging blind people to go out and break their necks, or get run over in

traffic, but I am encouraging them to find their way about and take a chance. If they are careful the risk should not be too great, and it's far better to take a chance than to sit still and be miserable. You will find the sense of smell of real value—you cannot mistake a fruit shop, you cannot mistake a restaurant, you cannot mistake the different smell when you enter a park to that which assails you when you enter a busy street. A good rule is this : when in doubt, stand still. If the worst comes to the worst, the motorist will at least know where you are if you are standing still.

Very often of course you will not walk alone, but with somebody else, and this leads me to say something about the relationship between yourself and your guide. I find it best to take hold of his or her arm, rather than to have the guide take my arm. The reason for this is obvious enough—if you take hold of the guide's arm it puts you a few inches behind him or her, and the result is that you can anticipate any movement and adjust yourself to it. If a step is coming from the pavement down to the street, the guide will prepare to and actually take the step a split second before you have to, and you are thus warned that it is coming. If, on the other hand, the guide takes your arm, you are a few inches in front and you cannot possibly anticipate any hazards of this kind. Of course, if it's a very deep step or a flight of steps the guide ought to tell you about it.

At first I was very shy about all this ; I felt that people in the street were looking at me, and this self-consciousness was a great handicap to peace of mind ; but I soon learned not to worry, and to speak quite frankly to my guide about the difficulties which presented themselves. If I had not been for a walk with him or her before, I would say, " Well now, you let me take hold of your arm, and we'll go along all right. Just tell me when we come to any particular step or difficulty," and thus I put my friend at ease.

Some blind people employ a " guide dog ". The blind man and his dog were familiar figures in earlier times. Generally the blind man was very poor and begged alms or sold boot-laces at the street corner. The dog led him to his pitch and by attracting attention added to his takings. This

use of the dog was recognised by Parliament, for when dog licences were introduced as a method of taxation, the blind man's dog when used as a guide, and the shepherd's dog when used for the care of his flocks, were excepted. This old law still stands. The association of the blind man's dog with the pathetic street beggar has prejudiced many blind men from utilising the present-day guide dog. This is a pity because the modern guide dog provided by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association is of the very greatest use, and he and his blind master, far from being pathetic figures, are a sturdy, vigorous independent pair much to be admired.

In the last war we became familiar with the use of sturdy intelligent dogs such as Alsatians, Belgian Police dogs, and Border collies for messenger work, police duties, bringing aid to the wounded, and so on. I think the Germans first turned the experience gained with this type of trained dog to helping the blind. In the early 1920's I visited Berlin to study what had been done. Schools had been set up where hundreds of dogs had been trained and hundreds of German blinded soldiers were trained to work with, and were provided with, an animal. Much about the same time I saw similar work being carried on by the "Seeing Eye" organisation in Switzerland and America. I walked myself some miles with these dogs in Berlin and in Vevey, and although I had not been through the training course, I satisfied myself that the claims made were not exaggerated.

Later the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association started in England and they have done most valuable work providing trained dogs for many scores of blind men and women, including a considerable number of St. Dunstan's men.

The guide dog—more usually a bitch is used because they are found to be more amenable and faithful—wears a simple harness over her shoulders with a short stiff leather loop which is just the right height to be held in the blind man's hand. Blind man and guide dog walk along together at a smart pace, the dog taking him round obstacles and stopping at a street corner. He feels every movement of his dog through the stiff leather loop. If there is a motor car approaching or any other obstacle, the dog will not go

on but will warn his master of the danger. The dog is not like the familiar terrier at the end of a string but is tall enough, sturdy enough, and strong enough to be a substantial guide.

Some months ago I wrote to a dozen or more blinded soldiers who have had guide dogs for some years, asking them how they were getting on. Their letters bear witness to the great degree of independence their dogs have given them and to the pleasure they derive from going freely for walks. Such phrases as ". . . without bothering anybody ", " she takes me everywhere I want to go—to buy a packet of cigarettes or visit my friends ", " I go to work with my dog every day ", make clear the value attached to the guide dogs by those who have become accustomed to their use.

Not all blind men or women will get on with a guide dog, but for those who do it is without doubt a highly successful development.

In everyday social intercourse the question of putting the other person at his ease is very important. Many blind people suffer a good deal because they are not at ease themselves, and do not put their companions at ease. You must remember that whereas sighted people meet blind people relatively seldom, *you* are meeting sighted people all the time. The technique for handling them, therefore, to your advantage and theirs is more likely to be understood by you, and you would do well to be completely unabashed in talking about the difficulties of blindness. I found in those early days, and I still find now twenty-five years later, that the ordinary person is most anxious to be helpful, but he doesn't know quite how much or how little to do for you, and he probably goes about it clumsily and awkwardly. An easy relationship between you therefore depends very much indeed upon you yourself.

Take the question of meals, for example. Suppose you take a girl out to dinner. Perhaps she has never been out with a blind man before, and she is most anxious to be helpful, and yet a little shy as to what to do. Put her at her ease at once by saying to her when the waiter comes round, " Now you have a look at the menu, and let us choose

something." Supposing they served you with a bit of chicken, you can practise as much as you like eating normally and independently, you can get very clever at handling your own food with a knife and fork, so that you do it naturally without causing any embarrassment or awkwardness to your companion; but however clever you are you'll find a chicken bone a devil of a business, and the question arises whether to struggle with it yourself or whether to ask for help. Personally I don't hesitate a minute. I say to my companion, "You might have a look at this chicken and take the bone out for me, would you?" and I go further: I say, "When you've taken it out, put it on your plate, or some other plate; don't leave it on my plate or I may try and eat it after all." She probably laughs, and gets on with the job: any strained situation or awkwardness that might have arisen disappears.

After dinner I say to her, "Now look here, I expect you want to get a wash; so do I. So come up with me and we'll find the attendant at the cloakroom and he'll look after me, and then I'll meet you outside afterwards". The result of taking the initiative is to put everything on a basis of understanding, and to avoid social difficulties which might otherwise become serious. I know some blind men who are so shy about these simple little matters that they don't go out and enjoy themselves, but stay at home and feel cut off from the rest of the world.

I soon learned that I could enjoy a theatre. It's a good thing to get there a few minutes before the curtain goes up so that there is time for your companion to read you the programme. There may be one or two incidents which are purely visual and which cannot be understood without a word of explanation. I used to ask my companion to tell me if such an incident occurred; but very soon, with a bit of experience, an almost uncanny knowledge of stagecraft develops, and one can anticipate and visualise most situations without any help. The words themselves and the movements of the figures on the stage carry the story.

In my early days there weren't any talking films; now there are, and a good many of the young blinded soldiers of this war go to films with a good deal of pleasure. Many

of the 1914–1918 men, too, enjoy them now, and I remember some years ago a party of them being invited by Columbia Pictures to attend a special showing of " Mr. Deeds Goes to Town ". Upon their verdict depended the decision to broadcast it or not. I still don't like a film as well as a play, because there is a much larger visual element in a film.

In time you'll learn to read braille, and then vast literature and magazines and even one or two weekly papers will be at your disposal, but it will be many months before you will read with ease and fluency ; so you will find reading aloud a very great pleasure, and in many respects a necessity. Here again an easy relationship between yourself and the person who volunteers to read to you is most important. Assume that your companion would not be reading to you unless he or she wanted to. While, therefore, you hope that he will enjoy the book or the newspaper himself, his primary concern is to read to you. If he is a stranger, or at any rate a stranger to this job, he'll probably say, " Tell me how you like me to read to you." The answer is that you want him to read as fast as possible and without making comments at the end of the paragraphs or pages. You do not want the reader's personality or interpretation to come between you and the writer, and this is particularly the case where private letters are concerned.

I remember an old lady who read me the newspaper once : it went something like this—" Liner torpedoed in the Atlantic. My ! Isn't that awful ! ! I don't think we'll read about that. Parson marries a Kitchenmaid. I wonder why they do that sort of thing ? "—a long silence lasting some minutes while she reads a snappy bit which appeals to her—then, " Oh, of course. Canadians, splendid attack. I'm tired of the war, I don't think we'll read that. Well, there isn't any news this morning."—A most fruitful session !

The readers who give me most pleasure are those who say to me, " Well now, tell me what you want me to read." I try and read *The Times* every morning, and my procedure is as follows. It's surprising how few people know their way about any newspaper, so I say, " Well if you open the paper at the middle, the left-hand column of the right-hand page,

at the top of that you will find an index. Just under that, you will find a summary of today's news. Now I'd like you to read me that, please." Then we read it, and mark any particular page to which we want to refer, and we go to those pages afterwards. We then have a look at the leaders and at the letters, perhaps at the City Notes—this takes twenty minutes, and I feel then that I have covered the current views in *The Times*. As a matter of fact I always have the other leading London newspapers, and look at the leading articles. Very often the heading of the article is enough to tell me that I don't want to hear it, or that I do. But if I am in doubt I say yes, and we read the first paragraph—three times out of four that's quite enough to tell you the line that the writer is taking ; but the fourth time the article is a good one, or on a subject that particularly interests me, so I hear the whole of it.

I think it very important indeed that blind people should be well-informed. It enables them to take part in conversation. It makes up for the fact that a good deal that is going on in the world escapes their eyes and is thus brought to their notice. Of course, since I was blinded, broadcasting has developed, and this is a splendid resource. Broadcasting might have been invented for the blind, so admirably does it meet their needs. Not only are the News Bulletins of the greatest value, but I find the talks are well worth listening to. Listening to broadcasting—and this applies to seeing people as well as to the blind—is a new art. The last forty years we have got out of the habit of listening, so available and so cheap have been the newspapers. But it is well worth cultivating this art, and well worth looking at the programmes and picking out a series of talks that are of interest to you, and sticking to them. If you switch on in the middle of a talk and hear a sentence or two, and then impatiently switch off and say, " Oh, why do they have so many of these damned talks ? " you will never get any pleasure from them. But if you stick to it and follow the speaker you will, in my experience, find it very well worth while. Broadcast plays, too, are a great favourite with me, and I never miss one if I can help it.

I remember that at first I used to find being read aloud to, and later on listening to broadcasting, very tiresome. I was impatient, I wanted to be doing something else. In these modern times things move so swiftly, entertainments which require very little effort are provided so lavishly, and there is so much fun and action and movement for the young that it is very tiresome to be tied down to more sedentary occupations, and particularly when your mind isn't ready for them. You have therefore got to go through a period of training, of self-discipline. To enjoy a good book you have got to do some work yourself, and at first this is tiresome, but the effort is fully repaid.

Reading aloud is a slow business. My secretary, who has worked with me for twenty years, so that between us there is a great understanding and sympathy in our work, reads to me at between two and three hundred words a minute, so fast that other people who happen to come into my office cannot follow her. But I follow her with ease. Even so it takes me twice or three times as long to get through memoranda, books, reading matter of all kinds, as it would if I could see. But there is a compensation : I do not have to read a thing twice or thrice—I get the gist of it at once, and I have developed a marvellous memory for things that have been read to me, or things I have dictated.

I haven't got a good memory for little disconnected details—often I cannot remember people's names, addresses, telephone numbers, or appointments that I have made, so I keep a little braille writing-frame, a little smaller than a postcard, in my pocket—on this I can write with a stylo seven or eight lines of one or two words each. I have invented a kind of shorthand of my own, and by this means I can put down a telephone number or an appointment or just a single word to remind me of a particular idea that has occurred to me that I want to work out later. But a memory for things that I have done has developed to quite an extraordinary degree—sometimes in my office a subject will come up for treatment, and I will say to my secretary, " You will remember that phrase in the letter which we wrote to him, I want something like that in this case," or, " Didn't we write and

ask him that?" and when the letter is found from the file, even if it is five or ten years old, I sometimes find that I can remember, not only what we said but almost the exact phrasing that we used.

So I found out gradually that there are many compensations for blindness. But one of the most important of all is to develop in yourself a means of directing and guiding the services of others, which are so freely offered to you. You must make yourself capable of friendship, make yourself interesting, make yourself a person whom others want to be with, and then show them naturally and easily how they can help you. To accept help easily and gracefully is as important to you as it is to those around you. And though you cannot help other people with your sight, because you haven't got it, you can help them in a thousand other ways, by understanding them and letting them talk to you about their troubles, by doing them a good turn when the opportunity arises. Friendship is a two-sided relationship.

3

MY MIND'S EYE

FEAR of the dark is one of the primary instincts of human nature. I should say that some traces of fear of darkness are natural to almost all human beings—unless of course their particular calling leads to their spending a great deal of time abroad at night. The idea of blindness, more so the threat, causes many fears and anxieties. Fear of unemployment, for example, or of inactivity, economic fear, fear of loneliness. I experienced all these feelings myself at different times, but familiarity with blindness overcame them. When first you are blinded your worst fears as to darkness are realised in full. The darkness enveloping you seems to be absolute. You really are in a dark place from which all light is excluded, and this physical darkness gets you down.

But gradually adjustment comes, and you very soon find, as I did, that the depth of the darkness in which you live and have your being is not absolute, but depends very largely upon your mood. Sight is both a physical and a mental process. Light brings its message through the pupil or lens of the eye to the retina ; there it is converted into some kind of impulse, probably an electrical one, and this is transmitted through the optic nerve to the sight centre of the brain. Here knowledge and experience and the power of interpretation cause the mind to see. When the eyes are destroyed this inward vision or mental sight is not destroyed. It persists in varying degrees. In the extreme case where the power of visualisation is keen, a blinded man may see images, remembered from the days when he had his eyes, or built up by description and analogy, and they may be very vivid. In more ordinary cases such as my own, images are not vivid. I remember roughly what St. Paul's looks like, or what the Houses of Parliament look like. I remember very accurately what the houses look like in which I spent my childhood. but I do not see them vividly, either when I am thinking

about them or when I am actually there in front of them. I have a very good idea what my wife looks like, or my daughter, though I have never actually seen them. Their personalities are keen and vivid, vital forces making a deep impression upon me. But there is no keen or detailed visual image.

On the other hand, and this is the important point, I do not see an impenetrable blackness all around me. As I sit here dictating this story, I visualise the fire in front of me, its presence and its comforting glow are brought to me, not by sight, but by sound and the infra-red rays of heat. It's rather hard to describe what I have in my mind. Perhaps I can put it this way—I see in my mental vision that there is a fire here in front of me just beyond my feet, which are up on the fender. I visualise it positively, but I do not fill in the details as to the shape of the grate, the formation of the coals, and so on. That's not necessary, and my imagination cannot be bothered to make a detailed picture. I see the dog lying at my feet, not all the time but only when he brings himself to my notice by pushing up against the chair, or by sniffing contentedly.

I have just stopped dictating for a moment or two to light my pipe. This process of getting ready to smoke and of smoking illustrates one or two things about visualisation which are interesting. Quite subconsciously and without thinking about it at all I have filled my pipe during the past few minutes. I did not form any mental picture of the pipe or the tobacco pouch because I was thinking about this book. But the actual placing of the pipe in my mouth, the presence of my hands so near my face, and the striking of the match, call attention to these objects and I see them all. In particular the stimulus of the lighted match with its noise and its heat, excites visual thought and visual memory.

While on the subject of smoking let me correct a very common illusion. Blind people not only can but do enjoy smoking. If anything I rather think they probably smoke a little more than other people, and rather too much. If this is so, it is because at odd times they are not so occupied as seeing people. If for example you are waiting for lunch and

it is five minutes late, you may pick up *Punch* or glance at the newspaper. The blind man will probably have another cigarette.

It is difficult to keep a pipe or a cigar alight at first. No doubt the regular flow of smoke is seen and acts as a kind of automatic control, enabling the tobacco to be kept alight to just the right extent. The blind man often finds that he lets his pipe or cigar out, or alternatively smokes it too fast, but practice makes perfect in this as in so many other things.

But even when I am not consciously making a picture in my mind's eye, the outlook is not black. I see a kind of horizon, bright, almost iridescent, a mixture of cheerful though faint colours, blue, crimson, and orange tints predominating. This background or stage upon which my visual images appear has nothing to do with light or sight ; it is present whether I am indoors or out, looking up to the sun or looking away from it. It is entirely a product of the imagination, but to me it's very real, and it's a very great comfort too.

The only trouble about this bright and cheerful horizon or screen as I have described it, is that it does not shut itself off when I get into bed and turn out the light, because it has nothing to do with light, and this factor counts, I think, in large measure for the fact that I do not sleep very well, or at any rate cannot get to sleep very easily. Sleeplessness is a very common complaint, but from enquiries I have made over a very wide number of people, I have come to the conclusion that the blind suffer from sleeplessness more than other people. I think the act of getting into bed, turning out the light, closing a curtain down upon the outside world, as it were, suggests sleep to the ordinary seeing person, and that this very powerful suggestion or association of ideas is a potent factor in the first and all-important business of getting off to sleep. With me this switching-off process is absent. But there are other reasons for sleeplessness too, though they are not exclusive to the blind. Lack of exercise is often the cause of sleeplessness, and blind people on the whole take less exercise than others. This is due to the difficulty of moving about—to the fact that a walk must usually be organised or

arranged, and that even in the house or garden, if you go about alone, you go about less actively, less quickly, than other folk.

I have mentioned exercise, because from what my friends tell me, I think the lack of it is one of the most frequent causes of sleeplessness amongst blind people—but this is not my own personal experience. I have made careful observations, and a few experiments, trying to find out what it is that causes me difficulty in going to sleep. I have not found any clue ; it is most elusive. I have tried taking strong and regular exercise, I have tried taking none at all ; I have tried thinking and worrying until the last minute before going to bed, there have been times when I have not been thinking or worrying at all ; I have tried having a hot drink, I have tried going to bed without a hot drink ; I have tried a whiskey and soda, and I have gone without it ; I have eaten sandwiches, and I have not eaten sandwiches ; I have gone to bed early, I have gone to bed late. There is no clue to sleeplessness, and I have not found a cure for it. It just comes and goes arbitrarily, and I shall be very interested if ever anyone can put me on a line which will elucidate this problem.

But though I have not found a reason or a cure, I have found a palliative which is supremely important. What matters about sleeplessness is not the sleeplessness itself, but the worry that it causes you. If in fact you lie awake for hours worrying about the day's work or tomorrow's work, or something that is on your mind, then you get very tired indeed, and the next morning you feel you are not good enough for anything. It's hard to tell whether worry keeps you awake, or whether because you are awake you worry. But whichever way it is, it's bad for you. What I do is to keep a braille book by the side of my bed and read quietly to myself for an hour or so, and then I generally find that the diversion of thought induces a sleepy feeling, and before I know where I am I have put the book on one side and have gone to sleep. And if sleep doesn't come, I just quietly go on reading. Very occasionally I read for three or four hours. It doesn't seem to do me any harm, it doesn't seem to make me tired, and the next day I do not feel any ill effects. The

important thing is that I have not been worrying. Worst of all is when you start worrying about not going to sleep. If you lie quietly and read, or think calm and easy thoughts, or don't think at all, in my experience you can lie for hours without actually going to sleep, and without suffering from sleeplessness. I don't say that two or three hours like this do you as much good as sleep, but I can definitely say that I have conquered the ill-effects of sleeplessness. I have written about this at some length because it interests me, but I am thankful to say that sleeplessness, with me at any rate, is not general although it occurs from time to time.

Dreams must be a very interesting study. What causes them? I confess I have never read much about them, though I expect there is considerable literature on the subject. I sometimes dream myself, though very rarely. The dreams of seeing people are, I suppose, nearly always visual, or predominantly visual, though sound and smell and touch are senses that may also be involved. In the old days if I dreamt of troops marching by, my primary impression would probably be visual—if I dreamt of them now my impression would probably be more the sort of impression they give you on the wireless, the tramping of feet, the occasional snatch of a song, the band in the distance, faint and then coming nearer, the clank of accoutrements. I occasionally dream of people ; they are there in some kind of visual shape, but the detail is not filled in.

I once invited a number of my blinded soldier friends to write and tell me what they dreamed about. Here are some of their letters :

My dreams may be divided definitely into two kinds. Sometimes I dream that I have perfectly normal sight, and on these occasions I see everything quite well—colours, shapes, etc. These dreams sometimes are of places I have known and seen and usually my relatives, or people connected with the places are also to be seen. On the other hand, I often dream that I am blind, but although I am conscious of this, I appear to be walking about quite easily and seeing everything, but not perfectly clearly ; sometimes, too, on these occasions, I see everything in monotone as though looking at a photograph ; for instance, blood on my handkerchief from a supposed nose-bleed appeared black instead of red.—T. F.

I find that I can see everything perfectly distinctly in my dreams and all is normal, but there is always one point in the dream when I come into contact with other people, and though I still behave as if I could see, realise that they know I am blind although they never show it. The following is a case in point. In the middle of quite an ordinary dream, I found myself in the smoking-room of a club sitting down reading a braille book. I looked up and found the room was full of business men ; these I recognised I had not met for years ; it struck me they would think it very odd to see me reading braille and I felt embarrassed, when a brilliant idea struck me of reading the dots by sight so as not to attract attention. This was done successfully.—M. P.

I am one of the semi-blind in that I can occasionally recognise an acquaintance of distinctive gait when meeting him by the way. Faces are entirely blurred and almost useless as a recognition mark. My dreams are almost invariably " full-sighted " ones. I may add that I have lost a hand and that nowadays the lack never appears in dreams at all, though in my early hospital days it used to impress itself very insistently and queerly on my dreaming life. My dreams of people met since my blindness are usually quite clear and represent the pictures I have of them from the few data that my vision supplies. —F. L. G. C.

I find personally that I muddle seeing and not-seeing in an extraordinary way. Here is an example. I was in a drawing-room I had never seen before with several great friends. Everything was quite normal and furniture, decorations, etc. were quite distinct. We were sitting talking when I noticed that a curtain pole was off its bracket, and I immediately climbed on two armchairs and put it right. Now as I did this I thought to myself that someone would protest that it was a perilous position to be in for a blind man, and that I might easily fall off. As a matter of fact they knew me too well to venture any comment but I was certain they thought a good deal as they watched me.

I have a hazy recollection of another occasion, walking through a large house knowing and realising I was blind, and then suddenly turning into a room with a large French mirror on the wall. And I promptly looked at it.—W. P.

In the same discussion Sir Arthur Pearson wrote :

I do not very often remember my dreams. Sometimes, however, I remember them very vividly, and curiously one of my most vivid experiences of this kind is a flying dream. I love this flying dream, and wish it came to me oftener. I fly through the air as if I were

swimming slowly ; I can go just where I like, though I cannot always continue as long as I wish to, but my descent, though impossible to resist, is always steady and even. This dream often takes me above water and I sometimes fly over country which in days gone by I knew by sight very well ; more often over mountain scenery of which I sometimes recognise patches. My flights occasionally seem to last for hours. I am often puzzled at the failure of friends and acquaintances to accompany me on my aerial voyages.

And now as to the distinctness of the impression of a dream. I see everything always perfectly clearly and vividly, with the exception of the faces of people whom I have met only since my sight left me ; these are dim and cloudy. The figures of my dream people are always quite clear.

My own contribution to the discussion was as follows :

Usually I dream that I see perfectly, and no idea of blindness enters my mind. Sometimes, however, an absurd and irrational thing happens, and though I dream that I can see I am somehow vaguely conscious that I am blind. For instance, every now and then I dream that I am taking part in some ceremonial parade, when every detail of the barrack square and the unit which I suppose myself to be commanding is perfectly clear. Perhaps I note that some man in the ranks is sloping arms wrongly, and I correct him, or perhaps I execute some particular manœuvre which pleases me very much, and though I see all these details perfectly, at the back of my subconscious mind there is a stupid notion that it is rather remarkable for a blind man to be able to drill a body of moving men on a parade ground.

The blind poet, Milton, saying good-night to his daughters, once observed, " May it indeed be as good to you as to me. You know, night brings back my day ; I am not blind in my dreams."

I have referred to certain visual impressions. Let me now tell of some other impressions of the world around me, which are perhaps partly visual, and partly otherwise.

During the early years after I lost my sight, I used to visualise words in print, or in handwriting — now after twenty-five years and after having used braille a great deal, I visualise words in braille. I even think of my own name, not as a signature but as so many braille signs, and if I am going along the street and somebody calls my attention to a particularly amusing advertisement for Guinness, my first

impression is of the word " Guinness " in braille, which is of course quite absurd. But that, I suppose, is the result of habit. With a little bit of an effort I call to mind the ink-print letters, and I see the advertisement in something like the shape that it appears to seeing people. Someone tells me of the spreading chestnut tree and the glass of beautiful-looking Guinness at the foot of it. I make my own picture of this, probably not very accurate, but mine for all that.

Talking about seeing my own name in handwriting reminds me how very difficult handwriting becomes. You remember how to form the letters, but the fact that you write any correspondence you want to indulge in on a typewriter leads to your hand getting out of the habit of making them. You tend not to join the letters up on top so that they nearly all look like " U "s ; you tend to write one letter over another, because you are failing to move your hand along, from left to right. I suppose if one practised assiduously one could keep up one's handwriting, but it doesn't seem to be worth while—the typewriter is so much more efficient, and in my case I am rather busy and do most of my letter-writing by means of shorthand or the dictaphone. Even my signature is something of which I am rather ashamed, but the effort required to keep it as good as I would like it to be is too great, and I am told that, though bad, it's not worse than some others belonging to people who ought to be able to do better.

Impressions of people interest me very much—partly because I am interested to know what sort of people they are, and partly because it amuses me to see how my first impressions work out after long acquaintance. Of course I get an immediate impression of a person's height and build by his handshake, and by the height from which his voice comes to me. The size of the hand and the nature of the handshake tell me a good deal about my visitor's character. The voice tells me his height, and his way of speaking and what he says tells me a good deal about himself. If I meet a stranger at dinner, shall we say, I always make a practice of trying to find out what he is interested in. Perhaps I

know this already because, in introducing me, someone has told me something, has given me a clue, or perhaps he is a well-known figure. It's when you have never met before and have no clue that the game is all the more interesting. How to get him talking about something that he knows, which will disclose his interests. I generally contrive to manage this, and I have found that people like talking about the things that interest them. If you can make your neighbour talk all through dinner, he, or she for that matter, is sure to say to someone else after dinner, " What an interesting person that was." Almost everybody is interested in a good listener. I do not pretend that I am not subject to this kind of flattery myself, for I always enjoy dining with somebody who draws me out. I recommend not beating about the bush, not talking about the weather and the plays in peace-time, or the war in war-time, but getting as quickly as possible to know what is the other person's interest, then you will find the conversation will flow easily.

Making conversation is an important art, especially important to blind people. Others at the dinner-table, or in the railway carriage for that matter, may pass the time and amuse themselves by looking at their neighbours, or looking out of the window or looking at the food or the waiters, or the other people in the restaurant. Your world is made up of what you hear around you, and it therefore becomes supremely important to draw the conversation to yourself—not by talking too much but by listening well and bringing your neighbour out to make the best of himself. He will like this and will think of you as a good companion, and will probably ask you to dinner again.

My impressions of a room are very important to me. Of course I know all about my own rooms at home, or the office ; in the course of time I have probably felt my way around every corner, examined every piece of furniture, so that they are all in their right place and are visualised, but when I enter a strange room, I have to pick up my impressions at once from the little bits of evidence that are about. If it's winter time, the most notable feature of the room will be the fire—I'll probably hear this and feel it,

and walk over to it and stand with my back to it. If it's summer time and there is no fire, then the windows will be open and there'll probably be summery noises coming in from them—they will give me a line on the shape and nature of the room. Or there may be a clock ticking on the mantelpiece—clocks are nearly always on mantelpieces.

The size of the room is felt the moment you enter it. I suppose this is a question of echoes—echoes from the noise of your own feet, echoes from the crackle of the fire, or the noises entering through the windows. The echoes go round and round and, reaching your ear from different angles, tell you the size and shape of the room. Everybody knows how different a room sounds when all the furniture has been removed from it—that is because it has too much echo, more than is usual. There's a kind of empty ring about it. Well, variations from this empty ring to the extremely quiet almost echo-less room with a heavy carpet and heavy curtains and lots of thickly padded furniture and so on—these factors are all helpful in getting a picture into your mind of the nature of the room.

This faculty for judging the shape and nature of a room and its contents was of great use to me later when I entered politics. The bodies and clothes of a tightly packed audience absorb sound waves and alter the acoustic characteristics of a room or hall to a very marked extent. Sometimes I would go to a meeting without any knowledge in advance of the room in which it was being held or whether the room would be full of people or relatively empty. I would generally ask my wife or the chairman to tell me what the room was like, but sometimes in the rush of an election even this was not possible. I had therefore to judge by sound and air pressure and the sense of obstacle how to pitch my voice so that it would be clearly heard at the back of the audience but would not be too loud. This was an interesting problem of acoustics. The same problem arose in the House of Commons, where it is important to be heard by all Members and by the official reporters and the press gallery, and yet it is equally important if possible to maintain an intimate conversational style and not develop an oratorical manner.

Save on rare and great occasions the House does not like oratory.

The most extreme case of an echo-less room is to be met with in a B.B.C. studio. Particularly in the early days of broadcasting, they used to try and make a room completely echo-less. It gave you a very dead feeling, and when you spoke your voice seemed to disappear, as indeed it did, into the softness of the padding around you. All the life seemed to be taken out of it. They have modified this considerably now, and few studios are as echo-less as the one I have described. In a sense the echo-less studio of early days gave you almost the same impression as if you were standing on a mountain-top. You spoke, and your words seemed to go away and never to come back.

You will judge what an enormously important part your sense of hearing plays when you are blind. I have often marvelled at this, and have wondered why my ears don't get tired, because I seem to be listening all day long. I can imagine that my ears would get tired if I lived in a railway station, or in some kinds of factories—the high-pitched noise of steam coming out of the engines, and certain other noises do seem to hurt me, and would in time tire out my ears I'm sure. But ordinary listening to the sounds around me, using my ears to see my way around, to get impressions of everything, listening to reading aloud, to the talking book, or to the radio—these things do not seem to tire them. They seem to be completely tireless. What a wonderful thing that is ! Of course my brain gets tired, but that's another matter.

I have found out quite a lot that is interesting about hearing. For example, I can range-find and direction-find with my ears. I knew this from practical experience before one or two clever scientists had applied the idea to the detection of enemy airplanes.

I have sometimes dropped my stud while dressing in the morning, and subconsciously, without thinking about it, I'll put down my hand perhaps some foot away to the left, and 18 inches ahead of me, and there will be the stud in my fingers. I doubt if I could do this if I only had one ear, but having

two and being conveniently placed one on each side of the head, they form a base from which this range-finding and direction-finding operation has been carried out. Exactly the same principle extended by various means is used, or was used in the early days, to shoot down enemy airplanes. Now of course, Radiolocation, which is really a scientific extension of the same idea, is used instead with even greater effect.

Some people say that the senses of the blind become much more acute ; in particular is this observation applied to the sense of hearing—this is both true and untrue. My hearing is certainly very much more useful to me than most people's hearing is to them, but on test I do not think it would be found that my hearing is more acute than the normal. What has developed is not so much the organ of hearing but the sense of appreciation and interpretation. Every little sound that occurs around me tells me something, sends me a message, which I interpret and use. Experience and an artful use of deduction, and quickness of appreciation, and practice, make me use all sounds to fill in the gaps which occur because I do not see. I hear the waiter fill up my glass at dinner ; every seeing person could hear this if he tried, but I hear it without trying. I hear my companion turn towards me as he or she speaks, and I turn in response. I hear my secretary's pencil writing shorthand ; I know instinctively when she has caught up with the sentence which I have rattled through rather fast, and then I go on again. This little tiny noise is capable of being heard by any normal ear, but I do not suppose the ordinary dictator hears it, because he watches his secretary's pencil. I hear a squeak in my motor car before most other people do. I hear my friend light his cigarette, and I pull one out of my pocket in order to share his match, and yet I must repeat that my hearing is not more sensitive than the normal—it is simply that I am making use of all these little noises which to me are so important.

I remember when I was a cadet at Sandhurst being taken out to be instructed in map-reading and in directing fire in open country. The instructor would ask our class to look across the valley to the hillside opposite. " There in the

middle," he would say, " is a church. So many fingers to the right of the church is a haystack." We would look in vain, we could not see the haystack. Then eventually he would point it out to us, or we would point it out to each other, and when we had become accustomed to looking at that distance and at that particular object, and for that kind of thing, we would see the haystack easily. Next day we would go to a similar valley and looking across we would see a haystack immediately. Why was this ? Not because our eyes had become any keener, but because our ability to use them and our sense of interpretation had improved. That is the way in which the senses of the blind are encouraged and trained, and are used by them.

4

I RIDE A HORSE

THE country that I know best by sight is the western corner of Dorset along the Devon boundary. There it was that I spent most of my holidays when I came to England to school. I came back there to convalesce and mend my broken spirit after I was wounded, and I go there now for a few days' change whenever the opportunity comes. For thirty-five years I have spent Christmas at Wootton Fitzpaine with my cousins, save for two or three occasions when the Great War or the present war made this impossible. This place was in a sense my home in England, and in the absence of my parents abroad I looked to and was guided and helped by my cousin and his wife as one would be by an elder brother and sister.

I was brought up as a child in Johannesburg, South Africa, which had been my parents' home since the early 'eighties when my father found his way up there, almost before it became the great mining centre of the world. In the year 1907, at the age of ten, I was sent home to England to go to a preparatory school and then on to a public school. I belonged to the last generation of English boys to do this. The development of first-class schools in South Africa, largely staffed from England, has gone on apace, and the first Great War broke the tradition that you sent your boy home to England to school if you could afford to do so. Thereafter boys continued to come to the English public schools, but not so much to the preparatory schools. This present war will probably diminish yet further the number of boys in each generation who come home to public schools, and even to universities. I think this is a good thing for South Africa, and therefore for the Empire. For if those whose ties with the old country are the strongest nevertheless send their children to South African schools and universities, they will be making those institutions even more representative of the

two races than they have been hitherto. But whether in the long run it is a good thing or a bad for the cohesion of the Empire, it is one of those inevitable things over which no-one has any control. In this respect it is just like the development of trade. The first Great War led to increased manufacturing in South Africa, and to a diminution of certain parts of the export trade from this country. The present war will do the same again. But in spite of this, there was a new export trade which grew up to meet the demand of growing industries in South Africa itself. I am concerned with this export trade now because for some years I have been connected with considerable trading businesses founded by my uncles in Basutoland, the Orange Free State, on the Rand, and in London. One of my keenest pleasures is to go back to South Africa, as I do from time to time, and meet my many connections and friends in that wonderful Dominion.

But to return to West Dorset—a country of small extremely green fields, with great banks and high hedges, and many little hills and valleys ; a country with a moisture-laden atmosphere which makes you feel sleepy at first ; a country of charming people, a little out of touch with the busy life of the towns ; a refreshing country, a sanctuary. I spent most of my holidays in a big country house there. I walked, and drove, and motored, and rode all over a vast stretch of this country. I knew the turns and twists of the lanes by heart, and the view from almost every hill-top. These memories are strong in my mind, and the power to visualise my surroundings enables me to make pictures of them again whenever I visit these familiar places.

Perhaps the way I enjoy this country best is by riding round it on a horse I know, and with a companion I like. I have ridden ever since I can remember ; I had a pony to take me to school in South Africa, when a native boy would run alongside to look after it until I came out of school. I learnt to ride properly on an old hunter mare in this Dorset country. I learnt to ride like a soldier in the Riding School at Sandhurst, and got my spurs too— a distinction which was not commonplace amongst Infantry cadets. I rode with the Cattistock Hunt and the Cotsleigh Harriers, and often with

my uncle Donald Fraser and his daughter Gladys on his stud farm in Buckinghamshire. Since I have been blind I have been on riding expeditions in the Rocky Mountains, on New Zealand and Australian sheep stations, and in a dozen different parts of South Africa. With this strong family and personal love of horses it is only natural that when I was blinded the question " Could I ride a horse with any pleasure ? " was often in my mind, and I determined to try. I had some difficulty in this matter, for my best and kindest friends did not quite like the responsibility. I sympathised with them because I saw their point of view, but my wish prevailed at last, and I got my ride. I went on a leading rein at first—a humiliating concession—but I soon discovered that it was neither necessary nor for that matter very safe. You place an additional burden upon the person you are riding with, and not being free to handle your horse yourself, you cannot deal with him if he is restless. A horse, like a man, cannot serve two masters. I soon found that I did not need a leading rein, and that it was possible to keep alongside of my companion by the use of the sense of hearing. Of course you want two horses that like going together, or at any rate do not mind going together. You need to be able to ride yourself, and you need a companion who can ride. Given these conditions, you can enjoy yourself thoroughly.

It is surprising what a great variety of noises a horse makes when it is walking along a road or cantering in a field. There are the hooves on the ground—never quite so clear as the B.B.C. makes them—but always a sure guide. There is the jangle of a bit when a horse shakes his head or raises his nose. There is the creak of the leathers on the saddle, and the swish of his tail. All of these noises become focal points upon which my ears, utilising the range-finding and direction-finding faculty which I have mentioned previously, give me a bearing. This process is quite subconscious, and causes me no worry or anxiety. I've spoken of these sounds first because they are continuous, and more or less automatic.

Then there are numerous echoes. For example, in a street the echoes from the walls give you an idea of the line of the road, and the distance you are from the building. In

a lane with high banks on either side, the sense of obstacle I have previously mentioned enables you to keep along the centre of the road or the side of the road. If your horse moves off a little to the left his hooves strike grass instead of hard road, and you immediately hear the difference. With your crop you reach out sometimes, and touch the hedge. But most important of all, of course, is your companion's voice. He may direct you, or he may merely be talking and give you your direction without realising it. If I am cantering up a field and stray away from my companion, I will probably know this as soon as he does, because all the noises I have mentioned will fade away and I will draw over towards him. But probably he will say " Hi ! This way a bit ! " and that will help me too.

There are three things a horse doesn't know—he does not know how fast he is going or how long it takes to pull up before you reach a ditch or a hedge. If you don't check him he will go on to the last second, and then either jump or swerve violently. So it's wise not to go off on your own, but to stay by your companion, who will tell you when to draw up. A horse doesn't realise that you are higher than he is, and he will take you under the branch of a tree before you know it's happened. Nor does he realise that your leg and foot are wider than he is, and he will bump you on a gate-post. So in these particular matters you must rely upon your guide to help you and to warn you.

I know of no pleasure greater than a good ride, particularly if it's in a country that I know—the feel and smell of the horse, and the leather, the fresh air, and the scents of plough and hedgerow and perhaps even of fox, the exercise and the companionship ; and from time to time, a pause on the top of a hill when my companion looks at the view, and I imagine it as I used to see it years ago. " Can you see the sea from here today ? " " Yes, there's a good deal of cloud over us here, but the sun is shining through, and you can just see the horizon with the high cliff on its left." I remember that picture.

I thought that kind of recollection would cause me pain or regret. Perhaps it did at first, but long since I have

learned to take comfort from it, and to get real pleasure out of it. Adjustment to blindness is very largely a matter of passing by the things you can no longer enjoy, and enjoying to the full the many things that are still yours.

The English climate, in my opinion, is hardly one for swimming. Whether it is because I was brought up in South Africa I do not know, but I generally find English waters rather cold. Nevertheless I get a swim whenever I can, and enjoy it enormously. There's something about swimming which is quite unique when you're blind—it is the fact that you can move about as vigorously and as fearlessly as you like in any direction without any fear of hitting anything. This is a very unusual pleasure. Generally of course one bathes in a party, and you don't need any guidance or help. The talk and chatter, shouting and splashing of your companions, tell you where you are. The buzz of noise from the children on the beach and the paddlers tells you where the shore is, or if it is a quiet bay, the splash of the waves. There have been occasions when I have bathed alone, not alone in the sense that there was no-one else present, but alone in the sense that I was the only one in the water. I knew that if I lost my direction I could shout, but in fact I frequently did not need to shout, for all the noises come from one direction when you are swimming, and you can thus find your way back to the shore without difficulty. Since some of our coasts are rather tricky and dangerous, and there are tides to be met with, it is not a wise thing to bathe, with or without a companion, without some local knowledge.

I have been an honorary member of the Bath Club ever since the last war, a privilege which I have greatly appreciated and enjoyed. I often go there, and do a bit of exercise in the gym. and then have a swim. There is a rowing machine, there are rings, and elastic gadgets that you pull away from the wall, and there is a punch-ball. The punch-ball is an old friend of mine—I have met him not only at the Bath Club but on many liners upon which I have travelled all over the world. I cannot use the kind that is strung from ceiling to floor, because when I hit it I never know exactly where it is coming back and it makes no noise, but the thing shaped

like a pear which hangs from a little platform just above your head is excellent. You hit him, and he bounces to and fro against the board just above you. If you hit him rhythmically, he will bounce rhythmically, and the noise he makes is a sure guide when to hit him next. With a little practice you can make patterns of noise ; you make him hit the back end twice, and then the front end once, and vice versa. You make him go from right to left, saying tap-tap bang, tap-tap bang—it's one of the quickest ways of getting up a sweat that I know. Quarter of an hour in the gym. followed by a few minutes in the hot room, followed by a bit of massage and a rub-down, and then a plunge into the swimming-bath, is one of the pleasantest interludes in a busy day.

In the bath itself I again rely upon noises and echoes. I enter it from the centre of one end, and swim boldly out, knowing that I have a very considerable distance ahead and on either side. If there's anyone else in the bath I hear them coming, and take care. If by any chance another member is swimming silently on his back and doesn't see me, I may bump into him, but you never seem to hurt yourself in the water. All along one side of the baths are the changing cubicles, and there you hear members talking. At the deep end is the gym., and there you hear somebody skipping or the punch-ball being hit, or other noises. As you look at the deep end, the telephone is over the left-hand corner, in a little room which is the superintendent's office. A little beyond the right-hand corner are some stairs up to the balcony. There's always some noise coming from all these various directions to tell you where you are. Then at the corners there is a waste-pipe to take the overflow. As you swim towards the corner you send a little wave ahead of you ; it reaches the walls, splashes back, and gurgles down the waste-pipe, and you are guided inevitably right into the angle where the steps are. There's no trouble about this, no conscious effort ; it is just a very great pleasure to be taking your exercise on your own without bothering anybody, and without any danger of bumping yourself.

In my early days I used to dive into the water ; starting from the spring-board or from the edge of the bath, I gradually

became more courageous and went up the steps, till I used regularly to dive off the step which was about the height of my head, I suppose seven feet from the water itself. I thought it wise when doing this to ask the attendant if all was clear, because there might have been a nasty accident if I had dived on to the quietly floating body of another member. Later I had to give up diving, because the old wound in my head gave me some trouble under water.

I have never been a fisherman, except of course a seaside fisherman. But I have enjoyed many pleasant hours in a row-boat with the children putting worms on hooks, and catching flounders, or in a sailing boat or a motor launch catching mackerel. This humble sport is not to be looked down upon. On a fine calm day with a bit of breeze, and a picnic, and pleasant companions, and a few fish, it can be very great fun, and perhaps the best part of it is the enjoyment of the boys and girls you take out with you. But it has never come my way to fish for trout or salmon, and this I very much regret. One day when the circumstances are right I may try it, for I am sure I would enjoy it very much.

A very old friend of mine, Captain Sir Beachcroft Towse, the blind V.C. of the South African War, and a very new friend of mine, Air-Commodore Huskinson, who was blinded in an air raid in London not long ago, are keen fishermen. I am no expert but I gather that it is best to use a wet-fly, for this kind of fishing does not depend so much on seeing your quarry and hunting him and killing him as does fishing with the dry-fly. From an open boat on a loch or lake, or in a river, or from a clear bank, you can cast a wet-fly with a little practice and learn how to strike and handle your fish. My friends who have done this before in their seeing days find no difficulty, and I do not believe that I should.

Rowing and sculling are admirable and agreeable exercises for the blind. I have had my own clinker-built mahogany skiff on Regent's Park lake for the last twenty years or more. During the better months of the year I used to go out and have a row for twenty minutes or half an hour each morning, and it was extremely fresh and pleasant. You need a coxswain to go with you, but beyond this there is no

special adaptation or alteration that is required on account of the fact that you do not see. I have a sliding seat in my boat ; this makes the motion far more agreeable, and also prevents you rubbing your backside. The only thing about a sliding seat is that you really must put on shorts ; if you try and row in trousers, you'll find that they catch you at the knees, and also that you get the backs of them oily from the slide.

In the old St. Dunstan's of the last war we had some wonderful times rowing and sculling. When the full toll of casualties from the Somme battle and the other battles of 1916 had been counted, there were found to be many hundreds of blinded soldiers. At the peak time there were as many as 800 under St. Dunstan's various roofs. In addition to three or four big houses in Regent's Park, many small ones were taken, and a great bungalow annexe was built, which itself held two hundred beds.

This great regiment of blinded soldiers was divided into companies and groups, and competitions between the House and the Bungalow and the College, and between various teams going by all sorts of fancy names which the men gave them, were the order of the day.

We had contests on Regent's Park lake, regular practices, and a big annual regatta at Putney. This was continued right up to the year before this war. Many scores, perhaps even a hundred or two, of the blinded soldiers from all parts of the Empire who came to St. Dunstan's learned to row. Many old Blues and other rowing men came up and acted as coaches. We took the men out in tubs, gave them a thorough drilling, then put them into fours, and on one occasion we made up an eight. I had the fun of stroking this eight, and we rowed in Marlow Regatta, and incidentally won our race against two or three River Clubs. So that I may not be claiming too much, let me admit that this was during the actual progress of the last war, when the River Club eights were pretty scratch crews.

But it's not so much a question as to whether you're very good or whether you win or lose races. What matters is the exercise, the rhythm, the sociability of it all. You keep

time with the other oarsmen, if you are not actually stroking the boat, by the feel of the boat, by the sound of the oar against the thole-pin and when it strikes the water, and by the rhythm of which you are a part.

The St. Dunstan's of this war is at Church Stretton in Shropshire. We had to move our Hospital and Training Centre up there because the beautiful building which belonged to us on the south coast of England had become too dangerous when the Germans occupied the French coast only eighty miles away. At Shrewsbury is a fine river and a rowing school, and with their kindness history is repeating itself in the field of rowing as in so many other fields, and the young men who have been blinded in this war are learning to keep their stomachs in and to come forward slowly, and all the rest of it, just as we did.

They enjoy tandem cycling also, with a V.A.D. or orderly to ride in front and steer. I well remember in the spring of 1917 when we could not obtain a tandem, my wife and I used to ride two bicycles up from Portland Place to Regent's Park lake, in order to go rowing in the early morning. We were engaged then, and perhaps this fact accounted for a proceeding which I would regard as strange, bordering almost upon lunacy, at the present time. I don't mean the lunacy of riding two bicycles—that was easy enough : I had to steer with one hand and hold her arm with the other—I mean rather the lunacy of getting up so early in the morning : a thing I have not found a pleasure since those days. Why is it, I wonder, that so many of us hate the early morning ? I have heard of great men like the late Marquis of Reading, who, when a young lawyer and perhaps even later in life, used to get up at five o'clock in the morning and do his work. I remember reading that Mr. Churchill, when he was First Lord in 1914, used to do the same ; but many of my friends, lesser mortals no doubt, find the morning a bad time, and the early morning a horrible time. My best work is almost always done at night. I am writing this book, for what it is worth, for example, between eleven o'clock and one o'clock most nights. Even after a long day's work and a drive out of London to the country cottage to which I have

moved during the war, I find my brain is clearest and my mind most active after dinner late at night. Perhaps it's simply because I have fallen into this habit, as so many others have, and that I would really do better to get up early in the morning.

I cannot leave this chapter on outdoor sports without some reference to the sports which we devised at St. Dunstan's. We used to have regular sports meetings, and the variety of contests which it was possible for our men to enjoy was surprising. Perhaps most surprising to the spectator was sprinting. We had a series of parallel overhead steel wires, stretched very tightly between posts, eighty yards apart. There was no special reason why the stretch was eighty yards, except that there was not room for a hundred yards, and that the longer you make the stretch the more the wire will sag. The blinded runner held in his hand a tape of strong material attached to a ring, which was threaded on to the overhead wire. In this manner he was able to run with the ring sliding along the wire rope, and this gave him his direction in the sprint. In spite of the handicap which holding the tape must impose upon the runner, very remarkable sprinting times were achieved. It required some courage and faith in the wire and in the Corporal-Major who told you all was clear, to dash off hell-for-leather for seventy or eighty yards.

Tug-of-war of course presents no difficulties, and because it involves teams and team-work, coaching and practice, and sweating and contest, it is an admirable sport. We have a splendid team up at Church Stretton now, and soon they will be good enough to challenge the local regiment. Putting the weight and throwing the cricket ball present no difficulty to the blind. In the case of the cricket ball, it requires just a little care to tell the thrower which direction to throw in, otherwise he will lose the ball, or break the head of some spectator. We devised our own hop, skip, and jump, to take the place of long jump and high jump. We have goal-kicking—a pair of goal-posts, a sighted goalkeeper who claps his hands to indicate the direction of the middle of the goal, and the blind man kicks ; sack races, egg and spoon,

wheel-barrow races, and a number of other races which involve pairs of people are easy enough. Healthy rivalry between individuals to make a record, competition between various teams representing the Hospital or the Training Centre or the men in a certain department, the exercise, the fresh air, the companionship—all these are part of the life of St. Dunstan's, and a most important part of the art of learning to be blind.

5

WE START WORK

After a few weeks the St. Dunstaner settled down and became accustomed to his blindness. He had learned to look after himself in his daily needs, to read and to write, and he began to think of his future career. One of the great anxieties about blindness in its early days is the economic sphere. You naturally feel that you are out of the active world, though the atmosphere of St. Dunstan's very quickly gives you some kind of reassurance. But it is not until you have settled upon a course of training for a profession or handicraft or business calling that you set aside economic fear. What you are afraid of is that you will not be able to keep yourself according to the standard to which you have been accustomed, and more particularly will not be able to get married and bring up a family.

If you have been blinded on service in the Armed Forces, or so far as this war is concerned, in the Home Defence or Air Raid Services, you will, of course, get a pension, but this will be modest whatever your rank, and will not be enough to enable you to lead a full life. Quite apart from this, you very soon realise that unless you can do something active to earn money you will not feel that you are pulling your weight, and you will not be happy.

It is surprising how frequently you can go back to the job which you were doing before, and the first thing for those responsible for the employment of the blind to do, is to explore with the blind person himself the possibility of returning to his familiar work. The most abundant faith in the capacity of the blind, knowledge of what others have done, knowledge of the various kinds of training that are possible and the apparatus that can be used, and the capacity to inspire ambition in the young blinded person—these are the qualifications needed for the interviewing official. I have interviewed many blinded soldiers of the last war

and of this, and have started them thinking about the line they should follow. " I couldn't do this, sir." " It wouldn't be possible to do that." These are familiar phrases, and one must be careful not to suggest the impossible, lest faith in one's judgement should be diminished. On the other hand, one must inculcate in the newly blinded person an attitude of mind that will not be defeated. Difficulties are made to be overcome.

Looking back, I can think of a great many cases where blinded officers and men have gone back to their pre-war occupations in spite of their blindness. A friend of mine, Harold Gibb, was an Army chaplain when the Great War broke out. He went out to France in the earliest days of the 1914 War as a chaplain to a Cavalry brigade. After the great retreat from Mons he became a combatant officer. He felt it was his duty to carry on in this rôle, but acted as chaplain to his regiment on Sundays. Later he was blinded in action and came to St. Dunstan's. After equipping himself for his new life he took a country living and was a successful parish priest for over a quarter of a century. He did not read braille very quickly and carried out the whole of his services by memory—a remarkable feat. He was a familiar figure at the services held annually during the years of peace at the Cavalry Memorial, where he frequently took part in the service.

A small number of other blinded officers and men went into the Church after the war. One, Andrew Nugee, was at the university reading for the Civil Service when the Great War swept him into its orbit, and he was blinded and came to St. Dunstan's. Then he returned to the university, went on to a Theological College, and was ordained in 1921. After a period as a curate he became a parish priest. Many years later he moved from his small country parish to a big busy town parish in which he has a curate of his own as assistant. He reads his prayers and when necessary his lessons from braille, makes braille notes for his sermons and copies of special forms of service or prayers.

Owing to the limited number of intellectual occupations which the blind can undertake, there has in the past been a

tendency sometimes for young men who have passed good examinations, either at school or the university, to be put into the Church. Some have been very successful, but many, I fear, have not. The reason for this is not that this vocation is impossible for the blind, but that men who are not really suitable have been entered for it. You must have a call to spiritual duty ; you must have a feeling for the work ; you must have personality and a capacity for making friends and commanding confidence. Given the necessary qualifications, there is no reason why you should not succeed.

A particularly interesting case is that of Dennis Pettit, a man who, blinded soon after his twenty-first birthday, having then seen active service for nearly three years, went to a firm of boot manufacturers as a shorthand typist. He came to see me round about 1935, and he said " I have been working as a shorthand typist for seventeen years. My firm have always been helpful and understanding ; but I feel that I am not really pulling my weight. Is there not some way in which I can get out of this humiliating position ? " I gathered that he had not had the benefit of a secondary education, but had received only the elementary teaching of a Church school. I gathered also that for many years he had been an active member of Toc H, and that for most of the time he had served as both branch and district chairman. In Toc H he had grown aware of a spiritual consciousness. I said to him, " Why don't you try to enter the Church of England as an ordained priest ? " The idea was a surprise to him—it was almost too good to be true that such a thing should be contemplated. Before, however, committing myself or him too fully to such an undertaking, I felt we must both of us have some proof of his quality, so I said to him, " You carry on with your present job, and in the evenings with our help you shall learn enough to pass the London Matriculation—this will take you two or three years. If you do not succeed in this, you and I will know that a calling such as that of an ordained priest is out of your line. If, on the other hand, you do succeed, we will then consider the next step." Well, to cut a long story short, he came back to me within two years and said, " I have matriculated." This he

had done using braille textbooks, his wife and friends reading to him in the evenings, and later with small assistance from a coach. This achievement was remarkable enough, and so I took the next step and secured the sympathetic help of his bishop, who said that if he passed the necessary examinations he would ordain him. This man is now at a Theological College and is doing well, and I am quite certain that with his experience of life, with the education and the culture which he is acquiring, and with his genuine spiritual feeling, he will become a very valuable addition to the Church of England.

I have often wondered whether it might not be a good thing for the Church of England if all priests came from amongst those who had spent some years of their lives in ordinary professional, industrial, or other occupations. I wonder how often the young man who, from his school days or from his university days, determines to go into the Church is thereby cut off from ordinary temptations, from ordinary life, even from ordinary conversation, and how often accordingly the rest of his life is spent apart from the humanity which he is called upon to serve.

Another of my friends, Geoffrey Pemberton, was a chartered accountant before the Great War. As a lieutenant he commanded a tank on the Somme, and was blinded in 1918. He came to St. Dunstan's and went through the ordinary preliminary training. Sir Arthur Pearson then said to him, "Why don't you go back to your business?" Here was an imaginative flight if ever there was one. How could a blind man possibly be a chartered accountant? However, his partner was interviewed, the matter was fully discussed, and he went back to his firm. In view of his blindness his partnership share was reduced, but after five years he came back on to a fifty-fifty basis. He has done well ever since, and considerably increased his business. He now has four partners of whom he is the senior and a staff of sixty. The truth in this case—and it applies to many other vocations—is that although there may be some aspects of the work which a blind man cannot do, there are many others which he can. In the accountant's office or the solicitor's office, for example, there is the business of interviewing the client, obtaining his

confidence, discussing his problems, and determining what course of action shall be taken. The blind man can engage and control the staff and generally see to office organisation. The detail work itself may be done—often is done—by clerks in the office, and in both of these professions the obtaining of new business is quite as important a factor as the carrying-out of the business itself. Pemberton's hobby is apple-growing. In this connection he wrote to me recently: "My fruit farm is still a great attraction to me and is making money and I get quite a bit of interest in meeting some of the principal apple growers in the country. I am very small fry as an apple grower but I get all the fun of knowing what is going on. Curiously enough this meeting of under a dozen apple growers is quite the brightest committee I have ever sat on—no duds or gas bags."

Amongst the men who came to St. Dunstan's was R. F. Wright, a young man who had been a technical assistant in an engineering firm. He learned shorthand and typewriting, and went back to a similar engineering firm in a humble job. But this did not satisfy him, and after a few years he and a friend went off on their own account and started a small business in hot-water and ventilating engineering. From small beginnings they built up a most successful contracting business. They now undertake orders running into scores of thousands of pounds, and are well and prosperously established. My friend remained in the office, dealt with the office work, looked after the staff, answered enquiries, and directed the general policy of the business. His partner went out on the jobs, doing the work that required actual eyesight. The partner died about ten years ago; since then my friend has been in sole control and has successfully maintained and extended the enterprise.

Yet another of my friends, H. D. C. Lee, was a Senior Lecturer in a large college affiliated to a university. He went back to his job in May 1919 and is doing it still. He has told me that blindness is a handicap of course, but that he has got over it, and that he has no difficulty in dealing with his students. His work, judging by examination results, has not been a whit less good than when he had his sight.

A similar case to this has arisen out of this war. Lieut.-Commander R. C. B. Buckley, G.M., R.N., having been blinded in the battle of Crete, where his cool and courageous conduct gained him the George Medal, came later to St. Dunstan's. He was a torpedo officer of fourteen years' service, and after special training at St. Dunstan's has gone back in the employment of the Admiralty as a lecturer and instructor.

The present Sheriff of Kingston-upon-Hull, Godfrey Robinson, M.C., came to St. Dunstan's at the beginning of 1918. He had been blinded and very badly wounded. After he had completed his training he went back to his family firm of food importers and distributors. He and his brothers conducted this firm successfully—he taking a full and active part in the business and devoting much time to public life in Hull. When this war broke out his brothers joined the Armed Forces and he was left alone to carry on the family business with all the war-time difficulties which that involved. He has for some time been chairman of the local branch and vice-chairman of the County Committee of the British Legion, and has been president of the Hull Rotary Club, a member of the Committee and later chairman of the Hull and East Riding Institute for the Blind, and in November 1941 he became Sheriff of Hull.

Captain Angus Buchanan, V.C., M.C., Order of St. Vladimir—the only holder of the Victoria Cross who happened to be blinded in the Great War—was a student at Oxford before war broke out. He returned to Oxford in 1919 after learning braille and typewriting at St. Dunstan's, and studied law, becoming articled to a firm of solicitors in Oxford. Subsequently he passed his finals and went into partnership with a solicitor in Gloucestershire. He has continued this work successfully for many years. His partner retired in 1933, since when he has carried on by himself. He tells me, "I am still very fit and have plenty to do."

One or two who had been journalists before the war, and others who took up this profession afterwards, succeeded in varying degrees. Writing is an admirable profession for a blind man. From reporting for a local paper to specialist kinds of journalism there are splendid openings.

Both journalism and public life were represented by Fred Martin. A journalist on the *Morning Post* before the Great War, he found no particular difficulty in returning to this profession, and contributed a number of articles to that and to other journals. He entered the House of Commons in 1922 as Liberal Member for East Aberdeenshire. In 1929 he contested the Central Aberdeen Division, and in 1931 and 1935 he fought the East Aberdeenshire seat again, as a Labour candidate, without success. While in the House Martin took an active part in the life of the House and sat on a number of important Committees, and continued his journalism, making regular contributions to a daily paper. He was, I think, the first blind man to enter the House of Commons since the days of Henry Fawcett, the Postmaster-General, who was Member for Brighton from 1865 to 1884. Martin continued his career in public life in Aberdeenshire, becoming a very active member of the County Council, and has been chairman of its Public Health Committee for very many years. A C.B.E. for his public services was conferred upon him in 1942.

One particular blinded officer, F. le Gros Clark, arrived at St. Dunstan's shortly after the Armistice. One of his earliest thoughts at that time was, " Surely one ought to be able to write fiction." Seeing one of his first attempts, Sir Arthur Pearson agreed. His first published short story in a popular monthly was a thriller with a blinded character in it. But by 1921 he was having stories accepted regularly, and is by now responsible for more than seventy short stories.

Meanwhile, he was beginning to be known as a lecturer and reviewer on social subjects. He contributed from time to time articles to the *New Beacon* on " Blindness in Literature and in History ". Later he published two novels, and finally a series of children's stories. These last had considerable success, and were translated into various languages and broadcast. This blinded soldier, who comes of a medical family, was, however, mainly interested in problems of human health and welfare. He had been for some time studying the social questions of nutrition and of the production and marketing of food. In 1933 he was asked to take

an active part in two scientific and medical bodies then formed to direct a public campaign against malnutrition in any class of the community. Since 1934 he has edited the bulletin of these organisations, which, with the present war, amalgamated to form the " Children's Nutrition Council ". This has been his main work and his true release into public life. Besides a host of pamphlets and articles on every aspect of the problem, he has written three books, of which the last was *Our Food Problem and its Relation to our National Defences*, published in the Penguin Series. His latest work is a booklet called *The School Child and the School Canteen*, published by the Herts County Council and with a foreword by Lord Horder. He is at present investigating with a Leverhulme Research Grant various aspects of community feeding, and the problems in this direction that the war has created.

Another who took his place in public life was Captain William Appleby. His natural abilities and personality led to his being given charge of the North-Eastern area of Great Britain for the Economic League—a body which has done much by propaganda and lecturing to promote goodwill in industry and understanding by working-class people of economic problems. He now takes an active part in the national work of this League.

But it was in the British Legion that he exercised the greatest influence. He was in a sense one of its founders, for he helped Earl Haig to bring various ex-Service organisations together into one. He travelled round the world with him, helping to found the Canadian Legion and similar bodies in the Dominions. He is, I think, the first member of the British Legion, and has been a member of its National and North-Eastern Councils ever since.

He and Major J. B. Brunel-Cohen, who lost both his legs in the last war, and subsequently became a protagonist for ex-Service men in the House of Commons, were and are, I believe, the only two who have been officers or members of the British Legion National Executive Council without intermission since its foundation. Both Appleby and Cohen are extremely valuable members of St. Dunstan's Council.

Music of course is a profession in which you would expect

the blind to be able to excel. Delius was blind when he wrote some of his most enduring work ; Alec Templeton in the United States and Ronald Gourlay here, are radio stars, and Dr. Alfred Hollins who died recently was an organist with an international reputation. But in fact amongst the blinded soldiers of the Great War there was no instance where any blinded soldier had really exceptional talent. One or two made a living as singers, a number who were engaged as telephone operators or in other professions took up singing as a second line and made a few guineas singing at concerts, dinners, etc. Five or six got together and made a dance band, which added something to their incomes and was quite successful. I am very keenly on the look-out now in this war to see whether any of the young men or women who come to us have any real talent, and if they have it will be developed with every resource which we can bring to bear upon it. In fact two artists were amongst the early comers to the new St. Dunstan's. Beryl Sleigh, an A.T.S. (F.A.N.Y.) driver, blinded in a blitz, was a professional singer before the war, and is studying in the hope of taking up this work again. Esmond Knight, well-known stage and film actor, blinded on the *Prince of Wales* in the *Bismarck* action, after a few months at St. Dunstan's has made a brilliant start again as broadcaster, actor, and writer.

A number of Great War St. Dunstaners who had shopkeeping experience were settled in small shops. This is a very satisfying occupation ; there is the pride of the ownership of the business, the responsibility and worry of conducting it. Responsibility and worry are an essential element in happiness—without them life is incomplete. Successful shopkeeping depends upon a number of qualities : good management, thrift, cleanliness, orderliness, capacity to get on with people, particularly with one's employees, and, as important as all perhaps, a winning personality that attracts people. You want the customer to like going into the shop because he will be able to have a word with his friend, the owner.

Starting in a small way at first, the blinded soldier handles the actual goods in the shop himself. His scales

are arranged so that he can weigh commodities for his customers. His goods, generally simple packeted goods like tobacco and cigarettes, or newspapers, are laid out in orderly fashion so that he knows exactly where to put his hands upon them, and he becomes an adept at taking money and giving change. He learns that a pound note and a ten-shilling note are different lengths, and he learns quickly to distinguish coins by the feel of them. But later he begins to develop, and employs an assistant in the shop, and then the other qualities I have mentioned of management and personality are his greatest contributions.

But shopkeeping was not confined to those who had had previous experience. Some took up this calling because their wives had previously worked in shops ; others because they felt they had a bent that way—and we judged that perhaps they were right ; others again started because they had lost an arm or a leg as well as their eyesight and were not fit for strenuous manual work.

In spite of the difficulties of today a St. Dunstaner of this war, Harry Wainman, is now a successful shopkeeper. Blinded and deprived of an arm by machine-gun bullets, he came to St. Dunstan's. He seemed to have the right qualifications for shopkeeping and clearly he could not undertake massage, telephone operating, or any other job requiring two hands. He is doing very well, and has a host of friends and customers in his little town. " We are getting on fine in the business and everything is running smoothly," he wrote to me in December 1941.

And there was another kind of shopkeeper who came into the business for another reason. He was started by us as a home-worker, perhaps as a boot-repairer or a basket-maker or a joiner. He began life by working with his own hands, and because he had personality and push he collected a fairly good circle of customers, and because he was thrifty and knew the difference between " takings " and " makings " he put by a bit ; then he probably came to us, and with part of his own money and some help from St. Dunstan's he stocked his little shop—if it was a boot-repairing shop, with a few sundries, leather goods, boot polish, and the like ; or if it

was a joinery shop, with photo frames, colours, pencils, and so on ; or if he was a basket-maker, with fancy goods of various kinds. And so he gradually developed from a workman into a one-man business. He probably employed a lad or an old man to do some of the work, and as the business increased he employed one or two more. Quite a number of blinded soldiers have become tradesmen and one or two substantial business men from these humble beginnings. F. G. Braithwaite of Guildford is an outstanding example. Very much depends upon the wife, particularly during the early years, though after a time of course, when business develops and assistance can be paid for, her task is less arduous and responsible.

The majority of men of course did not develop into these more responsible and remunerative methods of employment. They were taught to do various home handicrafts, boot-repairing, basket-making, mat-making, netting, joinery, rug-making, and so on. They began to leave St. Dunstan's in small numbers during the year 1916, and in much larger numbers during 1917 and 1918.

Early in 1917 I found myself, having learned typewriting well, braille a little, and having become accustomed to blindness, wondering what my future was going to be. I had not wondered long when Sir Arthur Pearson asked me if, at any rate for the rest of the war, I would assist him at St. Dunstan's. So to prepare myself for this I went through the workshops myself, spending a month on each of the handicrafts. In such a short time of course I did not become an expert at any of them, but I got some idea of the backache you can get from bending over a mat-frame, of the pain of hammering your own fingers when you are trying to put nails in the sole of a boot, and of the way in which willows or canes stick in your face when you are trying to shape them into a basket. I spent five or six months going through all the crafts ; I learned a good deal about the methods, and also a great deal about the psychology of the workman which was of the greatest use to me afterwards, and in the autumn of 1917 I started a little department which we called the After-Care Department.

The purpose of this department was to look after the St. Dunstaners when they had left and had been settled in their own homes. Ultimately of course the After-Care Department became practically the whole of St. Dunstan's, but in those early days we had a small office, a small staff, and made it our business to keep in the closest possible contact with each blinded soldier in his own home. I built up a staff of social visitors, women of experience and sympathy who went round to the blinded soldiers' homes to see how they were getting on, to report on their difficulties, to help them in their family affairs. I collected also a staff of technical men, skilled in the trades which the blinded soldiers were following. They went round seeing that the blind men kept their work up to standard, and taught them new designs and so on.

We established a central depôt which bought all the materials required for the handicrafts, and got them ready for use and sent them out to the men at cost price. We developed a sales organisation which took from the blinded soldiers any goods they could not sell locally, thus guaranteeing them at least a small definite market. Over the years we introduced insurance schemes, under which the men could make provision for their widows, holiday allowances, maternity allowances, special allowances in case of financial need or illness ; in fact a complete system of After-Care so that every blinded soldier and his family could rely upon St. Dunstan's for advice, for help, for comfort, for encouragement. Over and over again I have heard from the men how much they have appreciated this system and relied upon it. I recently had a letter from one of our men, an old St. Dunstaner who had gone up to our new place in Shropshire, where the blinded soldiers of this war are being trained, to encourage and talk to them. I think it worth while printing this letter, as it records not only the impression of an old St. Dunstaner about the new, but also his views of the After-Care organisation :

I have now returned home after a most enjoyable stay at Longmynd Training Centre. I took full advantage of my visit to join in all the life and pleasures of Church Stretton. I found the new " boys "

ready to accept me as a companion for walks, a welcome member of a dart team, and a companion in our mild pub crawls. I also joined in dancing and hill-climbing, altogether a wonderful privilege for me to make friends that I am hoping will last as long as I live and can get to St. Dunstan's holiday institutions wherever they may be.

The new men are naturally intensely interested in " After-Care ". I did my best to relieve all fears on that matter, but remembering the awful feeling of weakness and helplessness I experienced when I found myself on my own for the first time with some sections of poultry-houses, etc., I do appreciate that nothing but actual contact with " After-Care " will give them the assurance we " old boys " have as regards the completeness of that branch of St. Dunstan's.

The impression that I wish to convey to you is that as an " old boy ", critical and exacting, I am happy about our new additions to our family, and I do feel you are making a good job of re-starting them in life. I realise the new generation have a keener outlook on life, needing much more understanding than we did, but I envy them their hunger for knowledge.

My letter would be incomplete if I did not mention the happy relations existing between the folk of Church Stretton. I was charmed. It seems impossible that in such a short time there can be such understanding. I can only think of it as a great compliment to the new men who by their everyday behaviour have made such a condition possible. J. D. C.

We arranged what we called " After-Care Reunions " : in the thirty or forty biggest cities of the country we would have once a year a lunch party or a tea party ; we would perhaps invite the local mayor or other important citizen to come and take the chair and welcome us to the city. Members of my staff would go so as to give every man an interview if he wanted it. I would go myself as often as possible, and would speak to the men about St. Dunstan's. While the interviews were going on there would be a programme of dancing or a concert or something of the kind. These Reunions, to which wives came as well as the men, were immensely popular, and did much to keep the spirit of St. Dunstan's alive. We had to abandon these when this war broke out because of travelling and other difficulties, but we shall certainly revive them again, and they will offer an opportunity of bringing the new St. Dunstaners of this war into close touch with the older men.

Certain groups of blinded soldiers took up occupations which required special treatment from the After-Care point of view, and we set up organisations to deal with them. There were over a hundred and thirty men who became masseurs. A small number went on to study osteopathy. It is more difficult to build up a practice in this highly controversial subject, but if you do succeed you make more money than in massage and medical electricity. There are quite a number of highly skilled blind osteopaths doing well. Notable amongst them were Edmund Toft, who died so recently, and Captain Gerald Lowry.

We established a technical service for these men, inspecting their treatment rooms, keeping their apparatus in order, and giving them professional advice and introductions to doctors to enable them to build up a practice. The masseurs did extremely well ; it is an admirable profession for a blind man. Some who like routine work and regular hours were employed in hospitals and earned a regular salary ; others developed private practices, the incomes from which went into four figures in certain successful cases. Except for a very small fraction who fell out on account of ill-health, or unsuitability, these men were a very great success. Sir Robert Jones, the famous orthopaedist, wrote of them :

> The work that these blind masseurs do is very exceptional in quality. They are in every sense of the term a great success. I find them all intelligent and possessed of a wonderful gift of touch, together with keen enthusiasm for their work. Apart from their qualities as masseurs, I think they have an extraordinarily good psychological effect upon their patients.

I had an interesting time in the early days of the establishment of these men. Medical electricity, or electrotherapy, had developed. A great many women had learned massage rather sketchily to help in the last war and came on the market, and they had some knowledge of electrotherapy. It was said to be impossible for the blind to undertake this work. From my earliest days I have been a kind of natural engineer ; if there had been no war and if I had not gone to Sandhurst, I suppose I should have gone to Cambridge and studied engineering or science, and I might have gone into a business

where these qualifications could have been used. I have always had a feeling for machinery, and some understanding of it, and I naturally turned my mind to this new difficulty. I was able to invent for our men a milliameter, that is to say, an instrument whereby they could read by touch the amount of electricity that was passing through their patient from their electrical apparatus. The ordinary electrotherapist uses an instrument of this kind with a dial on it like a watch, which reads visually the amount of electricity. I had to devise a method whereby the needle could be felt without damaging it or shifting it. A simple clamping device made this possible, and this instrument opened the door to a new branch of employment for the blind. Then followed negotiations with the medical men to convince them that it was safe and proper for the blind to undertake this work, and with public bodies to secure recognition and so on. Finally we succeeded, and the result is that all our masseurs now are also electrotherapists.

Over a hundred men were taught to be telephone operators ; this is a job *par excellence* for the blind. They compete on level terms with sighted telephone operators. They do not operate the light-flashing system of the Post Office, but the private branch exchange, which is to be found in any substantial business. There are, let us suppose, from five to ten telephone lines coming into the business from the exchange, and there are from forty to fifty internal lines going to all the various offices. The operator learns by touch and later by sound to know which indicator has fallen when one of the telephones in one of the offices has been raised. He plugs in and says " Calling ? ", and then dials the number on one of his outdoor lines. He then switches through and says " You're through ". This job requires quick and skilful manipulation and it requires personality and knowledge of the business. A private branch exchange telephone operator is a significant person in a business—he is the first contact between the outside world and the firm, and the impression he gives of quiet efficiency and good manners is a very important part of the business's presentation of itself to the public.

Most of the telephone numbers commonly wanted by his firm and most of the callers from outside come to be known by heart by the telephone operator—he recognises the voices immediately and knows exactly who to get and who to ask for. Then there is a whole list of names that are not wanted so frequently—he keeps these in a braille directory, which we supply him with in the first instance, and which he keeps up-to-date himself, for he has learned braille very well indeed, much better than the ordinary blinded soldier. In addition he has learned to write shorthand on a special machine and by a special code, which enables him to take down from dictation at a fast speed. By this means he can take down messages even better than an ordinary telephone operator can write them down, and subsequently he types them out and sends them to the appropriate offices. For some years now we have not had a blinded soldier telephone operator out of work. There have been times, particularly during this war, when we could have placed half a dozen or a dozen more men if we had had them. They stuck to their jobs in London during the air raids of 1940–1941, some in great London hospitals, some in Government departments, and many in private firms. This is without question one of the most successful occupations for the blinded, and we are taking steps to repeat it in this war on as large a scale as may be necessary.

For those whose taste or health suggested that country life was best there was poultry farming. The holdings of our men varied from a backyard outfit, which provided a few eggs for the household, to large-scale farms in which labour was employed and considerable earnings could be made. The blinded soldier learned the technique of poultry farming, the feeding of birds, the collection of the eggs, grading, the preparation of fowls for table, mating, breeding, and incubating. He was able to do all the work himself except the actual care of the incubator, in which his wife or a member of his family helped him. Many succeeded in this calling, and are continuing to this day. Some failed, because when it came to the point they did not like the country or their wives did not like it. It is very important to choose people who

like the countryside. In this war it is impossible to settle any of our men in poultry farming because the shortage of feeding stuffs has made the Government decide that they cannot have any new entrants into this branch of farming. So we are postponing until after the war development along this line. When the time comes, we shall learn from experience and shall settle people in this occupation temporarily for a year—only then, if they have passed through all the four seasons and have come to the conclusion that they are really lovers of the land and of all that it implies, will we permanently settle them as poultry farmers.

In poultry farming as in other callings, initiative, personality, and salesmanship are important attributes, and those men who succeeded best were those who had these virtues to the greatest extent. They were the men who developed large farms, employed labour to look after them, and devoted their own ability to the sales side of the business.

In this war we are developing with a great measure of success a new organised outlet for the manual worker. Over eighty blinded soldiers, some veterans in the forties, some young men in the twenties, are now employed in aircraft and munition factories, fitting, inspecting, testing, and operating machinery of various kinds. They acquire great dexterity and do a normal job with normal efficiency. They enjoy the work and the comradeship of factory life. I hope permanent employment for many may be assured.

Notable examples in this field are Paddy Campbell, the first Irishman of this war to come to St. Dunstan's, who was blinded in Belgium while serving with the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and now fits the most delicate instruments into airplane panels at a rate exceeding the sighted worker whose place he took, and ex-Stoker Petty Officer Richard Dufton, who after eight years' service in the Royal Navy was blinded by enemy action just as he was completing a special two-year Mechanicians Course, a man with high engineering attainments who is doing well as a "progress chaser", following special jobs through, dealing with hold-ups, keeping production moving.

A small number of men who suffered from an additional

disability, such as the loss of a hand, and who could not therefore undertake manual work, were taught to be speakers and lecturers and organisers, and were employed by St. Dunstan's in its publicity and collecting departments. I do not favour the employment of the blind for the raising of money, where their only function is to go round and excite sympathy by exposing their own disability to the public. I think this is degrading to the individual, and bad for the reputation of the organisation. But where a man has a genuine gift for speaking or organising, there is no reason why he should not be employed in this way just as a sighted person, and I have the very great advantage on my staff of the help of a small number of blinded soldiers who have these qualifications. It seems to me to be no crime if your disability helps you in your work, though it may not be in good taste or good for the individual if he should rely entirely upon his disability for a sentimental effect.

I urged all our men to take as active a part as possible in the life of the community in which they lived. Many joined the British Legion and became active members of branches and of committees ; some became officers and chairmen ; some joined Toc H and took an active part in this work ; others the Rotary Club, and from being ordinary members became presidents or officers ; others were members of the Buffaloes or Druids, or became Masons, and one or two went through to hold high office. There is no reason why a blind man should not become a Mason, and special arrangements are made to enable him to learn the various procedures and secret matter that are required to qualify. Many took part in local life, joining Rural District Councils, Urban District Councils, and County Councils, and other bodies, and quite a number rose to take their place on committees, or as chairmen of committees.

6

SIR ARTHUR PEARSON

As I was working at St. Dunstan's, I continued until my marriage to live at 21 Portland Place, the house in which a number of blinded officers lived with Sir Arthur Pearson himself. The two years I lived with him, and the five years during which I knew him and worked for him as an Assistant at St. Dunstan's, were very important years in my life. His own life story was romantic and interesting and exciting. By his own abilities and hard work, he had risen from the relative obscurity of a small country parish, of which his father was rector, to be a leading newspaper proprietor, and then when he was stricken blind at the height of his career and in the prime of life, he had started again and had virtually made a new name and place for himself as an outstanding philanthropist. His name and fame linked with the name and work of St. Dunstan's were to spread all round the world during his own lifetime.

The " spirit of St. Dunstan's ", as we have proudly called the ordinary blinded soldier's attitude towards blindness, was his spirit—it not only influenced the thousand officers and men who had personal contact with him during his lifetime, but also the other two thousand who came to St. Dunstan's after his death, and through them and their example the whole of the blind world. There had, of course, been notable and outstanding blind men before Sir Arthur Pearson's time, but never before had the opportunity of making such a deep and widespread impression upon the blind world occurred. The ordinary civilian blind are spread throughout the community ; they are of all ages, and of a variety of interests ; they are gathered together in relatively small local schools, workshops, and organisations. There has been good leadership and direction of many of these enterprises, but none of them could compare with St. Dunstan's in the opportunity it afforded for the right leader

to mould and shape so many lives, to create such a corporate spirit of defiance against disability, and to spread such a gospel of hope.

And in Sir Arthur Pearson we were vouchsafed exactly the right leader. I think it is true to say that he did a very great work indeed and that no-one else could have done it so well. His previous life—one of intense competition in the world of periodicals and newspapers—had trained him to take hard knocks and to survive them. Moreover it gave him a vast host of friends in the newspaper press, who were only too willing to help him with his great appeals for the blind. He was the first man to organise appeals in a widespread manner, and to raise really large sums of money without which a great work was impossible. And with this background he had a natural sympathy which overflowed in abundant measure to all those around him. He possessed also a capacity for inventing phrases which exactly expressed what he had in his mind, and what the young blinded soldiers were feeling: "Victory over Blindness"—one of the headlines under which he made his appeals, and the title he gave to his own book, was one of these. The poignancy and drama of the return to civil life of hundreds of young men, fit and strong in every respect, but blinded, lent itself to great appeals and caught the imagination of the public.

I have said that there were notable exceptions, but the common belief was that the blind were poor and down-and-out, and sorry for themselves, and resigned to their fate, which was only alleviated so far as the public understood it by a kind of charity that looked upon the recipients as inferior beings; contrast this with the emergence into the public eye of a whole battalion of men who walked upright and were alert and ambitious, and who replaced resignation by eagerness and restless push. This was a drama indeed. And Sir Arthur Pearson knew how to and had the means to impress this upon the general public. The attitude of Government, and of local authorities, and of the public at large, began to change. They began to take a constructive view of blindness, and this attitude bore fruit, abundant and rich fruit.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, a number of kindly men and women had started organisations for teaching and employing the blind. Sometimes they financed them themselves, sometimes they raised sums of money from their friends, and so the first efforts to organise aid for the blind were of a voluntary nature. During the century the State began to take its first interest, by passing an Education Act, which made compulsory education available for the blind, but it was not until the early years of the twentieth century, more particularly the five years before the Great War, that organised labour, then beginning to express itself through trade unions and in politics, began to take an active interest in the welfare of the blind.

Until the early years of the twentieth century trade unions had confined themselves to industrial activity and benefit work amongst their own members, but as the years passed they had begun to spread their interest into social affairs generally. A group of blind workers, led by a very remarkable man, Mr. Ben Purse, began to impress upon the Labour movement that the State should take a greater part in aiding the blind. Before the Great War a resolution was passed in the House of Commons setting up a Select Committee to investigate the welfare of the blind. After the Great War the public attention called to blindness, and the dramatic evidence afforded by the success of St. Dunstan's men, had created a public opinion to which Parliament listened. The Blind Persons Act of 1920 was passed—this Act made the registration of all blind people compulsory, so that for the first time proper records of all the persons who were blind, in age groups, became generally available. The Act made it compulsory for local authorities to prepare a scheme under which every blind person should have some care and treatment suitable to his condition. For the young it would be educational training, for the adults it would be training and employment, either in a workshop or at home, and for the old it would be social welfare, visiting in their homes, and the teaching of braille by home teachers.

Over the last twenty-one years this system of local care, in which the County Councils, the City Corporations, and

the County Borough Councils have shared with voluntary agencies the care of the blind, has developed enormously.

Sir Arthur Pearson had first entered the blind world to lend a hand in raising money to help the National Institute for the Blind. This was in 1912. At that time this organisation was primarily a publishing house for braille literature, and it was only natural that Mr. Pearson, as he then was, well known as a publisher of periodicals and owner of newspapers, should take an interest in this publishing house for the blind. By 1920 the National Institute for the Blind had developed into quite the largest and most important publishing house in the Empire. It had multiplied its activities in this field manyfold, but it had added others. Certain categories of blind persons, such as, for example, babies under five years of age, secondary school or public school types of boys and girls, and so on, are not sufficiently numerous to justify local schools all over the country, and the National Institute for the Blind rendered a very important national service by establishing, or fostering, schools to meet this need. The local authorities would send cases to these schools, which were run partly on their behalf and partly by the National Institute's own funds.

As the National Institute for the Blind increased in strength and its appeals throughout the country became more widespread, it began to conflict with local voluntary agencies for the blind, and Sir Arthur Pearson suggested that, instead of competition between these bodies, co-operation between them might be advantageous. So as President of the National Institute for the Blind, which he had now become, he began to make agreements with local societies, and the idea of unification of collections began to spread throughout the blind world. In the last twenty-one years this process has gone a great deal further, and many valuable new ideas have emerged as a result of experience. But the original conception of unified collections was his, and this was another of the great contributions he made to the welfare of the blind.

But it was at St. Dunstan's itself that his heart was most deeply engaged. He spent the greater part of his time there during the war years, and during the year or two after the

war when large numbers of men came into the organisation. He would interview each individual and encourage and advise him as to his future. He would personally direct the appeals for funds. He was like a father to his great family, and men and their families and staff loved him.

During the year or two before the war, and during the war itself, he had many helpers. He was a hard taskmaster, and did not suffer fools gladly, and I have seen him, metaphorically speaking, blow a member of his staff out of his room with hot words and a flash of anger, but almost immediately his kindly humanity would assert itself, and he would impulsively express his regret and give that member of the staff a handsome present, or show his appreciation in some other way. He was a very generous man and loved giving presents.

Sir Arthur Pearson would say, indeed he did say it to me frequently, that the person who most influenced his life after he was blind was a young girl, Miss Irene Mace, who came to him as nurse, and reader and guide, shortly before the Great War. When St. Dunstan's was started she became his eyes, and much of the smooth working of this great and growing organisation was due to the quiet power and influence she exerted on his behalf. She became Commandant of the V.A.D., which by 1917 and 1918 numbered many hundreds. It was she who came to see me in hospital in 1916, and it was she whom I married in 1918. She has been my eyes for twenty-three years. She wouldn't like me to say much about it, but nothing I have done could have been so easily done without her, and many of the things I have done I am sure I should not have done at all had it not been for her encouragement and help, her wisdom and her judgement. I do not know any living person with a greater gift for friendship than my wife, and since I myself am not naturally very forthcoming in this respect, she has contributed more than I can say to any modest success I have attained in public life. We have lived happily for twenty-three years : we shall live happily ever after.

We set up house in 1918 and I continued my work at St. Dunstan's. We spent most of our holidays with Sir

Arthur Pearson during the remaining years of his life, and I worked with him daily, helping him in his various interests in the blind world. I used to represent him at public meetings when he was unable to go himself; I used to go and see Government departments for him, and gradually I came to be his second-in-command. He died in 1921. We lost our best friend who had done more for us than any other living person, and St. Dunstan's lost its founder and chief, but not before he had established it on foundations that were to endure.

The attachment of St. Dunstaners to their late chief was very strong and personal and many hundreds of them came to pay their last respects at his funeral. I do not suppose that so large a number of blind men have been gathered together before or since that event. They came unaccompanied from all over the British Isles; they were met at London stations by soldiers and policemen—a company of the Guards had been lent to us to act as escorts, and we improvised sleeping accommodation for them all over the offices and training rooms at St. Dunstan's in Regent's Park.

The Committees of the three separate legal charities which then composed St. Dunstan's had appointed Lady (Arthur) Pearson, widow of the founder, to be President of St. Dunstan's, and had elected me Chairman, and the St. Dunstaners approved of this choice, welcomed me as their leader and gave me their promise of support. Without this measure of confidence to help us, the President and I and Sir Neville Pearson and my other colleagues on the Committees could not have guided the policy of St. Dunstan's for twenty days; with it we have carried on not unsuccessfully for over twenty years. Now in this war we have the great advantage of the services of Edwin Fisher, Chairman of Barclays Bank, who is our Honorary Treasurer, and Sir John Caulcutt, Chairman of our Finance Committee, who exercise a strict and at the same time a most enlightened control of our finances.

I should like to mention the debt owed by St. Dunstan's generally, and by me personally, to one or two particular members of the staff who helped me so much. They were

Mrs. Chadwick Bates, then Secretary of St. Dunstan's and now head of our work in South Africa ; Ernest Kessell, then Treasurer ; W. G. Askew, my right hand in those early days and now Secretary and chief administrative officer of St. Dunstan's, and my private secretary, Miss E. Goole.

Since those early days I arranged for the amalgamation of the three Committees into one, and established St. Dunstan's with a permanent legal constitution. It is a company, limited by guarantee, carrying on its activities subject to Company Law, not trading for profit, and is registered under the Blind Persons Act 1920. This registration requires that the charity shall have a representative committee, or council, of public men or women, that it shall keep proper accounts and submit them to the registration authority, in our case the London County Council.

In passing let me observe that I think this kind of registration extremely valuable. Although the registration authority does not interfere in policy in any way, it is some safeguard to the public that the funds of the charity are properly applied to its objects, and that it is run on sound lines. I wish it were possible to extend the system to all hospitals and charities.

St. Dunstan's relies for its income upon collections made from the British public and from English-speaking sympathisers throughout the world. There is hardly a corner of the world where there is not a committee, or a voluntary worker, who does something for St. Dunstan's. And there is certainly not a city, town, or village in these islands from which we have not had support of one kind or another. The continuance of this for so many years is primarily due to the behaviour and the courageous outlook and the success of our blinded soldiers in their many homes throughout the country, but it is due also to a clear policy and sound organisation. I do not propose to describe our ways of securing financial support, by donation, subscription, and legacy—suffice it to say that we tell our story as clearly as we can and leave the rest to the goodwill of those who read it.

For over twenty years now I have issued appeals for St. Dunstan's, and they have met with universal goodwill

and a splendid response. Very occasionally, perhaps once in a thousand letters, I receive a reply, often a most friendly one, saying that the writer does not believe in charity and thinks that the State should do all that is required for disabled men. From time to time a politician of the Left Wing, or a Left Wing newspaper, will echo this sentiment, and there have been leading articles occasionally arguing that whilst we must support charities for the time being we ought to try and abolish them by getting the State to do its full duty.

I think it worth while trying to deal with this argument for a space, since my belief is that were it to prevail much harm would be done, and as we are now in the process of making tentative plans for the post-war world it is important that both sides of this question should be stated.

The first thing to remember is that almost all philanthropic or humanitarian activity started with private enterprise, or private philanthropy, or private charity. Long before local authority or State had developed an interest in the poor, the humble, or those who were in special difficulties, private people had come to their aid. Probably this started in the family and spread to the village or small community. It is natural that this should be so, for those nearest to the people who are hurt, that is to say, members of their family, or of their immediate community, are the most likely to be aware of the need and to be moved by it to do something. It does not follow that all care of the handicapped or of the poor must necessarily stay in voluntary hands, or that it would be better if it were to do so. When the whole nation or a majority of it has made up its mind to render national or organised local services to a section of the community, it is time for the voluntary service to come to an end and hand over its function in that particular connection.

Thus schemes of national health and unemployment insurance, schemes for insurance against widowhood and old age, and a national system of pensions for the war-disabled, are a regular part of our social life, and nobody would suggest that such services should be, or could be, carried out by voluntary agencies. On the other hand, such services were in fact started by voluntary enterprise, and it will ever

be the case that new kinds of need will impress themselves upon individuals and will be taken care of by individuals or groups, or minorities of the community, by voluntary effort before they commend themselves to the whole community and lead to action by Parliament. This is in fact what happened in the blind world, and more particularly in the world of the blinded Service man. More than a hundred years passed between the time when the first voluntary agency for the blind was founded in England and the passing of the Blind Persons Act 1920, which really brought the State and the municipality into the field in a large measure.

When the Great War broke out there was no adequate State scheme for blinded soldiers. There could not be, because in the past there had not been any number of them, and the odd case that had turned up from the Boer War and from previous campaigns had been dealt with individually. No doubt if the blinded soldiers of the Great War had been completely neglected and public comment had arisen the Government would have set up some organisation for them. But long before this occurred Sir Arthur Pearson had taken the matter in hand, and had established a home and a training place and a system of care.

It is difficult for the State to set up a national scheme for the care of a small body of people, because it is bound to be pressed almost immediately to extend the same or a similar method of care to other groups of people whose situation is analogous.

Now it may be a good thing that all who are handicapped should be generously cared for, but if you are to wait until all will be cared for equally you may have to wait many years, perhaps many decades. Meantime many lives are ruined and much suffering is entailed. Voluntary enterprise in business, and in philanthropy, has the facility for quick action and for adapting itself to particular circumstances, and it is my belief that it will always be able to render a special service in special cases.

I have no hesitation whatever in saying that in the case of the blinded soldiers they have been better and more generously cared for by St. Dunstan's than they could have

been cared for by any Government. Not only has a larger sum of money been made available to help them than any Treasury would have afforded, but also much personal skill and sympathetic individual contact has been possible through St. Dunstan's which no Government department could have provided.

It has sometimes been represented that it is undignified or displeasing to the individual to receive help from a voluntary agency rather than from the State. This is certainly true if the voluntary agency is patronising. But it need not be true, and I do not believe for one moment that it has ever been true of St. Dunstan's. I myself as a young soldier in France in the last war accepted with gratitude the help of the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., the Salvation Army, and other similar organisations who brought their services to the battle-line itself. I do not remember being upset by this, or adversely affected by it in any way. On the contrary, it gave me an insight during my early youth into the kindness and understanding of men and women which I had not previously experienced. I myself as a young blinded soldier took advantage of the facilities freely offered to me by St. Dunstan's, and gained much thereby. I do not remember feeling awkward or uneasy about this. It is a great thing to learn how to give help and to receive help with grace.

In the development of social services the time undoubtedly comes when it is right to replace the inequalities and differentiation of voluntary effort by municipal or State effort, but I believe that whatever Government we have at any time, and however generously they interpret the will of the majority of the people, there will always be a minority who are more enlightened or more generous or more sympathetic towards a particular object, and they will express themselves through voluntary effort of some kind or another in meeting some particular human need.

Do not let us ever do anything by legislation or propaganda to deter or damp down this voluntary spirit of human kindness.

History repeated itself in our Dominions. The gospel of St. Dunstan's was taken there by able young blinded soldiers

who inspired movements for the care of returned blinded men. Captain, now Colonel, Edwin Baker, O.B.E., M.C., in Canada, Clutha Mackenzie, now Sir Clutha Mackenzie, and Donald McPhee in New Zealand, Advocate R. W. Bowen, M.L.A., in South Africa, Joseph Lynch, C.B.E., in Australia, and many others have rendered valuable services to the blinded soldiers and the blind community in general in their Dominions.

I made a tour round the world in 1934 and happened to be in New Zealand on 9th December, the anniversary of Sir Arthur Pearson's death. I wrote a letter to *The Times* newspaper in London, and it was published on that day. I think it worth reproducing here :

To the Editor of "The Times"

SIR,—A young Canadian from Toronto and a young New Zealander from Auckland returned to their homes after the Great War. The last thing the Canadian saw was a trench in France—the new Zealander, the desolation of Gallipoli. They were blinded, but they went back to their homes with a new vision and a new message. They had learned to conquer blindness at St. Dunstan's, where practically all of the Empire's sightless soldiers were trained and re-educated. And they meant to show Canadians and New Zealanders the way to victory over blindness.

I have had the opportunity of travelling across Canada and through New Zealand, and have met practically all the blinded soldiers, and have examined and studied the education and employment that are being provided for the blind population as a whole.

Before the War there were excellent local institutions for the blind in Canada and New Zealand—notably in Halifax, Montreal, and Auckland. But the public conscience had not been stirred to its depth, and there was no national organisation.

Captain Edwin Baker, of Toronto, and Mr. Clutha Mackenzie, of Auckland, are themselves examples of the St. Dunstan's spirit, which knows no difficulty too great to overcome, teaches forgetfulness of what is lost, and seeks opportunity for the use of what remains. These disciples made converts ; philanthropists and business men gave them support, and now, in 1934, the results of their labours can be placed on record.

There has been a renaissance in the blind world of Canada and New Zealand. National organisations cover the whole of these Dominions. Committees in every centre seek out the blind, register

them, and see that they receive the best education, reading matter, social life, entertainment, and, above all, employment—professional and manual.

The Governments, central and provincial, have enacted ameliorating legislation, following upon and, in some matters, improving upon the English " charter of the blind ", " The Blind Persons Act, 1920 ". Free wireless and special voting facilities have been provided by the Parliaments.

No ambition on the part of a blind man or woman is denied encouragement and financial assistance. No trade, profession, or handicraft which can be adapted to provide employment for the blind is neglected. Substantial sums of money are contributed by a public whose conscience has been awakened and interest secured.

The War has wrought many changes, but here and there good has come out of evil. The development of nation-wide work for the welfare of the blind in Canada and New Zealand is the direct result of the War and of the return of these two St. Dunstaners to their homelands. I might add that a similar movement started in South Africa a few years ago, when a National Council for the blind was set up, with another blinded soldier from St. Dunstan's, Mr. R. W. Bowen, M.L.A., as its chairman.

I hope this note may reach *The Times* for publication on December 9th, the thirteenth anniversary of the death of Sir Arthur Pearson, Bt., who founded St. Dunstan's and inspired this world-wide movement. I find the memory of his example and personality as vivid among St. Dunstaners overseas as among the blinded soldiers at home.

I am, etc.,
IAN FRASER,
Chairman—St. Dunstan's

AUCKLAND, N.Z.
December 1934

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WAR AGAIN

During the few days before this war actually broke out, I was very busy, as were most other people who had responsibilities of any kind, putting the final touches to our organisation to meet the shock, and I had not much time to think of anything else. But after working far into the night, and having a cup of cocoa and a sandwich, I went to bed for a few hours but lay awake. Presently my thoughts drifted away from the worries of the day and the problems of tomorrow, and I thought about myself and the forthcoming war. I wonder how many others of my generation had the same thoughts? I had served in the last war as a junior officer without distinction, I had not been very brave or very dashing or very otherwise—I had just behaved as all the rest of us did and had done my best. I was a boy of eighteen when I first took my platoon into action, and I was still under nineteen when I was retired on account of my wounds.

As I thought over those days I recalled my first experience under artillery bombardment. I had been frightened—frightened on two accounts: first of all for my own life and limb; and secondly, frightened lest I should let the show down; but I got over this as we all did, and though I continued to be frightened from time to time I got used to shell-fire, and to crawling about and being sniped at, and to all the other hazards of that war, and even though later on shell splinters and bullets may have come very near to me, I was never so frightened again as I had been at first.

Thinking over these things again in the early days of September 1939, I wondered how it would be this time. So far as I was concerned my duties were in London, and it would be bombardment from the air, not artillery bombardment. I had not experienced this before, and I wondered if it would be very different. I thought it would, and then I thought it wouldn't. After all, there is not very much

difference between a "crump", that was a 5·9 howitzer shell, and a small bomb, or between one of the shells from those enormous 15" guns and a heavy bomb. They would probably both approach with the same whistling sound, and the explosion would be much the same, depending on how near you were to it. I comforted myself with this thought, and then a very nasty feeling would come over me. I had a great apprehension, not so much this time for my own skin (though I had that in mind) but primarily for my behaviour. I was forty-two now, not eighteen ; I had led a sedentary life for twenty years or more ; I wasn't young and ardent for the fray ; there was no thrill or excitement about the forthcoming war ; on the contrary, to me it was a great sadness, a sadness that mankind could be so ignorant of his welfare as to drift into such a calamity. I thought of all the potential wealth of the world, of all the raw materials, the factories, the workmen, many of them not properly utilised ; I thought of our economic system, of the flaws in it ; of the plenty in certain parts of the world and the want in others ; I thought how our capacity to manage our affairs, and particularly the economic side of them, had been left behind, and that the wonderful control which man had obtained physically over nature had not been equalled by his skill in the problems of distribution. Nor were his morality and character worthy of his technical achievement. I thought how wonderful a place the world could be if all its resources were utilised properly, so that every man had a decent share and every young person a fair chance. I thought of the very great progress we had made during the period since the last war—how standards of living had improved, and the social system had taken much more account of the needs of humbler folk. I thought of the achievement of St. Dunstan's in twenty years, how it had gone on from strength to strength, how it had carried out its promises of lifelong care for the men who were blinded in the last war, how it was well on the way to fulfil them during the next twenty years or more until the last blinded soldier of that war had died. I thought of the three thousand St. Dunstaners of the last war two thousand of whom still survived and were busy at their jobs in their

homes all over the world, looking to us for guidance and leadership and help, and though no organisation is perfect and we may have failed here and there, we had never let them down. I thought of their wonderful patience and courage, of the individual and corporate spirit that animated them, of the conquest of blindness which they had made their own. Never before had so large a body of blind men achieved so large a measure of success—not only success in the competitive world of action and earning, but success in finding happiness. I thought of their sons, now growing into manhood, many of whom would be sacrificed in the war that was to break in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, now. And as I have said, these thoughts made me very sad.

And so without elation, without enthusiasm, without adventure to take me into the war cheerfully, joyfully, gallantly, as I and many like me went into the last war, I was full of apprehensions, and in this mood my thoughts turned away again from greater matters to myself. How would I stand up? Perhaps the responsibilities around me for my two thousand blinded soldier comrades, for the staff that worked in my various offices, added to my apprehensions. It was important that I should set a good example. My job was not big or important as jobs go, but there were people who looked to me and I was blind.

I had conquered blindness so far as my day-to-day life was concerned; it had ceased to worry me, it had ceased to hinder me in doing the things I wanted to do. I had become Chairman of St. Dunstan's and had retained that position for twenty years or more, and St. Dunstan's had prospered. I had been elected to Parliament more than once. I had become a Governor of the B.B.C. and director of various companies. I had shown myself that blindness did not bar me from activity and happiness. For twenty years or more I had ceased to regret and had not been depressed, because the handicap of blindness had become light and had not stood in my way.

But now a new factor threatened me. I might find myself in the middle of a string of bombs. I don't think we had begun to call it being "straddled" by a "stick"

of bombs yet. I might be hit or someone else in the house, or the air-raid shelter might be hit, and I wouldn't be able to take care of myself or other people as effectively as a man with all his faculties. I might be a burden on my wife, just at the time when I ought to be her greatest support. My house might be in flames, and I might not see my way out of it. I might not be able to give help, or run for help, as I should. I might be at a terrible disadvantage, and all because of the handicap of blindness.

And so for a time I went through something of that earlier anxiety, and perhaps even self-pity, which had characterised the first few weeks of blindness. But, thank God, this phase was short-lived ; the stress and anxiety of the times, the necessity for action and for decision, took me away from the realms of thought and speculation.

More than a year before the war I had planned with the Ministry of Pensions what would be St. Dunstan's function in a new war, and we had been appointed by this Ministry to be their official agents for the re-education, training, settlement, and after-care of soldiers, sailors, and airmen who might be blinded. Negotiations with Dominion Governments followed, and in the course of time a similar trust was imposed upon us by all of them, so far as any of their troops in the United Kingdom were concerned.

As the war went on we were consulted by the Dominion Governments as to the care of those members of their forces who, serving in distant theatres of war, would be returned to their own countries instead of coming back here to Britain. So St. Dunstan's influence, which had spread to the Dominions a quarter of a century ago, continued to have its effect upon the many blind worlds in our Commonwealth of Nations, a testimony to the example and character of the Dominions men who came to St. Dunstan's in the last war, and went back to their countries carrying our gospel with them.

We had a beautiful big convalescent home on the cliffs near Brighton. We had planned and built this place for the veterans of the Great War, to give them holidays and periods of convalescence and training, and to ensure for them that in

their old age they would have a home to come to, and if need be to live in if they were lonely or ill, or had no-one to care for them. We had planned this building on novel lines—it was specially designed for the blind, to give them as much sunshine as possible, to be as easy as possible for them to walk about in, to be their home, a worthy monument of the regard in which a generous British public held them. Every floor was identical with every other floor, or a mirror image of it, so that a blind man, once he had learned his way about one floor, would know his way about all. Straight corridors wherever possible, no steps, guide-rails around difficult places, three radio programmes at every bedside, rubber edges to the doors, so that a careless bump would not hurt, and one hundred and one other little bits of special design, had made this place unique of its kind. Hundreds of blinded soldiers had already enjoyed a period of rest and recuperation in this home, and now it was to be turned over to a new purpose.

We had already made plans in the greatest possible detail to add a hospital wing, with operating theatre and the rest of it. We had actually taken into stock some of the steel girders, which might be difficult to obtain at short notice, and within a few days of the outbreak of war the contract had been let and the building of this addition had begun. The first nine months of the war were spent here, and the first casualties came into this place.

There was the young officer in a Highland regiment who, leading his men in an exercise at night, had rushed upon supposed enemy trenches, where men of another battalion had taken up their position and dug themselves in, and as he jumped from the parapet into the trench, a rifle was shot off in his face, the blank cartridge blinding him. I felt peculiarly sorry for him—he had been knocked out in such a futile way, he had not served abroad, he had not seen the enemy—all his preparation as a Territorial officer over many years appeared to be wasted. I thought if you must be blinded, surely better to be blinded doing the job for which you've been trained, and in the face of the enemy. This young officer went through all the anxiety associated with

the fear of blindness—he was in fact blind for many weeks, but he was full of spirit and he made splendid progress, and gradually his eyes began to recover. Skilled medical treatment and good nursing had their effect, and after a few months his eyes had so far recovered that he was able to go back to his regiment and carry on.

Then came a young airman. Just after the Germans had entered Belgium he had been flying in his fighter and had engaged in a number of dog-fights when a bullet hit his wind-screen. The glass of which these wind-screens are made is a wonderful material, it does not shatter easily, and many an accident to the eyes is saved by its toughness ; but sometimes a direct hit will cause a splinter to fly off, and in this case splinters entered both his eyes. The sight of one eye was gone at once, the other was severely damaged. But with courage and tenacity, and a very small and limited field of vision, as the oculist told me, he managed to fly back home seventy miles and land his machine safely. He too recovered sufficient useful vision to go back to the Air Force in a ground job.

Then came casualties from the Scottish Division, the one that remained in France and was cut off from Dunkirk. A private of the Black Watch was blinded by fragmentation from a hand grenade when holding the line on the Franco-Belgian frontier. He was a coal miner in a Scottish pit and was one of the first of Militiamen to go to France. His father served in the last war, and he had two brothers who were awaiting " calling-up " notices. A Cameronian was blinded at Ypres by a bursting shell.

For a few days it looked as if the old warfare to which we had become accustomed in the last war was returning. It looked as if a line might be established in France, a line from Switzerland to the sea, on either side of which millions of men would hammer away at each other and slaughter each other until one side or the other got tired. But no sooner had this idea begun to settle in our minds than the swift events of May and June followed each other inexorably. The collapse of the Belgian army, the collapse of France, the evacuation from Dunkirk—it is not my business to describe

these, nor am I capable of doing so, but each of them had its consequences for St. Dunstan's. Cases began to come in from all the actions in which our troops were engaged on the Continent, and to them were added accident cases from the forces at home. Guns and bombs would explode in training camps ; aerial bombardment which hitherto had been confined to a few military objectives blinded a small number, and then while England was marvelling at the escape of her army, which might have been exterminated, while Mr. Churchill was taking over the leadership of the nation with his memorable call to arms, which stirred the hearts of all of us the world over, there was a lull and for a time all seemed quiet.

Early in August we began to realise that the possession by the Germans of the whole of the French coast line brought the enemy within eighty miles of our Hospital and Home at Brighton. We had thought that Brighton, being a seaside holiday resort without any important industry, and with the whole of the London area between us and the enemy, would be a fairly safe place in which to establish and maintain a hospital and training centre for blinded men. But now it was different, and already reconnaissance airplanes were flying over the South coast, and single bombs were being dropped. A bomb fell on the house in which my secretary was sleeping, knocking half of it down, blowing all the windows and window-frames over her bed, and blocking the door so that she could not get out. With great composure she came to the office and told me all about it. Though it is one's duty to generalise on broad grounds it is a mistake to be too much influenced by personal experience. Nevertheless I have often been struck by the significance of an event affecting you personally or someone else in daily contact with you. The old saying " It brings it home to you " has much truth. We began to wonder whether it was right to try and maintain a school for the long and painful re-education of young war-blinded people in an area so vulnerable and so near the enemy.

With magical swiftness the undefended shores of Britain began to take on a new air—troops came into hotels and

buildings ; barbed wire and other defences began to appear along the sea coast ; guns began to take up their places, and many peaceful seaside resorts became part of the fortress line of England, guarding the Channel. And so we moved out of our beautiful building with deep regret, but convinced that it was our duty to take our sorely wounded men to a quieter place where they might have some measure of security from air-raid warnings and aerial bombardment, in which to regain their peace of mind, of which the enemy had robbed them. Later our building was taken over by the Admiralty for a school. We were glad of this, for although we would have wished it to be used by any of His Majesty's Forces, and although I was myself a soldier and have the greatest regard for the Air Force, nevertheless I would rather put a nice building in the hands of sailors than of any others in the Armed Forces. It is a tradition with sailors to look after their ships.

We distributed St. Dunstan's to different parts of the country. A hotel in Blackpool and a country house in Dorset formed convalescent homes where veterans of the Great War might go to recover from illness or from air raids, and a big hotel with adjoining buildings in Church Stretton, Shropshire, formed the centre where our Hospital and Training Establishment was to grow up.

A West End surgeon of the highest reputation and nurses from one of our leading eye hospitals manned our Hospital, and a splendid staff composed partly of old members of St. Dunstan's staff, who had experience of the last war and of the last twenty years of peace, together with some girls whom we had trained to be V.A.D.s in this war, manned the Training Centre. They and the handful of young men who had been blinded in the early months of this war were the population of our new establishment. The older members of the staff brought experience and knowledge of how the blind should be cared for, and of the methods of training them. The younger members brought characteristics of their generation, which was the same generation as the young men themselves.

We were starting to build a new St. Dunstan's, and yet it was not going to be a new St. Dunstan's but a continuation

of the old. I felt it extremely important that the new generation should become a part of the old, that the unity of St. Dunstan's should not be impaired by the entry of young men in our ranks, but rather that it should be strengthened and fortified. There was much I thought that we could teach them about blindness, but we must not assume that they would learn in the same way, or that their reactions would be identical with ours. We must recognise that they would in their turn make their full contribution towards the strength of St. Dunstan's and our knowledge of blindness, and so I determined that the new St. Dunstan's was to be a young St. Dunstan's. There would have to be older people to help us, members of the staff with knowledge were essential, older people to guide and direct when necessary, but the spirit of the place must be young, and gradually the staff that built itself up there must be young.

The other day I was standing in the Hall at St. Dunstan's. It was quiet, when suddenly the whole place seemed to come to life. There was the snatch of a song from one direction, discordant whistling from two or three directions, the shouting of names, the rustle of paper, and of people moving about.

I was in the middle of a busy school, and the first hour had just come to an end. Teachers and pupils were moving to the second hour. On one side of me was the Braille Room, where a number of tables were disposed, each one with two chairs, one for pupil and one for teacher, for learning to read with your fingers is very difficult and individual instruction is necessary. Another room was similarly arranged for typewriting instruction. In the big Lounge were a number of convalescent men who had not yet begun their lessons. They were playing dominoes, while in the corner was a man with a V.A.D. reading a letter from home.

" We'll pull them over," said one young man to another—there was to be a tug-of-war that afternoon between the Training Centre men and the Hospital men. " Don't forget there's a rehearsal tonight," said a woman's voice—she was referring to the play they were getting up. Six blinded men would take the parts ; they had to be taught their words, and be produced.

Through the front door came another group of young men. They were returning from the Workshops. Stray remarks about planes, and saws, and willows and string, reminded me of the carpentry, basket-making, and the netting rooms. Every blinded soldier learns a handicraft—not necessarily because he intends to follow such a course in the future, but as part of his early re-education, to enable him to use his hands and see with his finger-tips. A joke—I am afraid rather a rude one—about Jerry reached my ears. "Jerry" is the skeleton used by the massage class to learn their anatomy.

"How is old So-and-so getting on?"—the question was put to the Matron. "Old So-and-so" was a young man of twenty who left a fortnight ago to take up a job as a telephone operator. He had learned how to be blind, to read, to write, to look after himself, and to earn his living, in just over a year. He was the first St. Dunstaner of this war to go out into the world to lead, as far as possible, an independent normal life. "He is doing well," says the Matron.

This was the sound picture which built itself up in my mind as I stood there in the Hall, listening to what was going on during the five minutes' change-over from the first hour to the second.

8

LEARNING TO BE BLIND

The education of the blind is a sure process leading to definite results—not so the employment of the blind. Given the right methods (and they have been skilfully developed in the last century or so), those who have been blind from infancy can be educated until they attain the highest possible standard of academic distinction. There are many notable cases where young men and women have won scholarships and have obtained Honours degrees at universities.

Mention of those who have been blind from infancy, leads to my remarking that the common phrase "born blind" is a misconception. It is as rare for a person to be born without eyes as to be born without legs or arms, or with some other organ of the body missing. But in earlier times a great many persons went blind during the first few weeks or months of infancy, and they were commonly said to have been born blind. The cause of this blindness is a disease called ophthalmia neonatorum. This means inflammation of the eyes leading to blindness, and is caused by a disease being present in the mother at the time of birth—some of the bacteria find their way into the baby's eyes, and if not treated immediately, cause blindness.

Before the last war as many as 20 to 30 per cent of all the blind children in this country, and it was true of most other countries, had gone blind from ophthalmia neonatorum. The virtual eradication of blindness from this cause is one of the most notable and dramatic episodes in the history of preventive medicine. A tiny drop of silver nitrate solution placed in the eye of the new-born baby destroys the bacteria which can do so much damage to the eye, and all risk of blindness ensuing disappears. So simple is this and so effective, that after Parliament in 1915 made ophthalmia neonatorum a notifiable disease, so that doctors and midwives

had to inform the local authorities of such a case, the number of blind children dropped magically.

Nevertheless there are still a few blind children in our midst, due to other diseases and to accidents, and within the year or two of this war there have been two or three cases of little boys and girls who have been blinded by enemy bombs. One terribly sad case of this kind came under my notice at St. Dunstan's. A workman in a factory in the Midlands belonged to the Home Guard. On a certain Saturday afternoon in September 1940, a tea party and social was taking place in a canteen in the works, and a number of wives and children were there. A single German raider flying over the town dropped one or two bombs, and one of them fell in the middle of this tea party. A large number of men, women, and children were killed and wounded, and amongst them this Home Guard and his wife and the little girl of five years were blinded, while a fourth member of the same family, a much younger child, was killed. An extraordinary and devastating calamity. The Home Guard came to St. Dunstan's, being a soldier, and his wife came too to be with him, and the child came also because they could not be parted.

I saw this family from the earliest days when it entered St. Dunstan's, and I saw the father and mother again only the other day, and since it records the horror of uncontrolled and indiscriminate bombing of civilians, and also illustrates the courage of human beings under blows which seem hardly possible to be borne, it may be well to devote a line or two to their story.

My wife and I, who have seen much tragedy, have never seen anything so tragic as this family—the poor little mother clinging to her child, the child not knowing what had happened to it, but influenced to despair and fear because of the mother's condition, and the father quiet and broken-hearted. They had come to St. Dunstan's Hospital from the Emergency Hospital in which their wounds had immediately been dressed. One of the functions of St. Dunstan's Hospital is to take in cases like this, particularly from bombed areas, so that they might be in a quiet place, receive the finest skilled attention

which can be given to them, and recover from their blindness. Within a few days kindly nurses were showing the mother how to bath her baby and look after it, and the capacity to do this had worked marvels in reviving her spirit to live and carry on. The father, mixing with other men, had begun to realise that there was much left for him to do. Before almost he knew what had happened to him, he was learning to typewrite and to read braille, and taking part in sports and other activities. Within a few weeks the mother was dressing herself and the child, and knitting and taking an active part in the social life of the place. Now she has learned to cook again, and to make beds, and to look after her home. Now the husband has finished his course in telephone operating, and they are in a new home of their own and he is working a telephone switchboard with his old firm. As soon as it was humanely possible, we parted mother and child and persuaded the parents to send the little girl to one of the Sunshine Homes run by the National Institute for the Blind for young people. It is not good really for a blind child to be brought up at home. The ordinary home cannot provide the necessary facilities and the ordinary parents have not the necessary skill and knowledge to do the best for the child.

But by the most extraordinary coincidence of misfortune, this Blind Babies' Home was itself bombed a few weeks later and three of the nurses were killed. This little girl was resident in the Home at the time, and though neither she nor any of the other blind babies were hurt, the effect upon her was, for the time being at any rate, to disturb her nerves. The effect upon the parents was even more serious, and as a result they took the child away and sent her home to live with her granny. This is not good for the child, and I am using my best influence to get her back to a suitable school for blind children tucked away in a quiet part of the country where she will have every attention. A happy ending to such a dreadful story seems incredible, but it has been achieved, and if you could see the parents now, you would see why, for they are active and busy and cheery, though there remains a great sadness about their little girl. Perhaps even this will turn to joy as her education proceeds under

proper care, and she also takes her place in the world later on.

St. Dunstan's, however, is not a proper place for children, and normally they would not come to us. Nor in the main do young boys and girls come to us, for they are not by the nature of things likely to be engaged in any of the fighting or defence services, but recently a boy of seventeen joined our ranks. He was a Home Guard who was on duty in Plumstead during an air raid when an incendiary bomb came down and, falling immediately in front of him, burst, and blinded him. He is the baby in St. Dunstan's, and is one of the most cheerful in the place, taking part in all the activities of the Home : he has been quick to learn braille and typewriting and to look after himself, but being too young to choose and study for a career or profession or occupation at the present time, he will go on with his ordinary education. He left school when he was fourteen. He will be handicapped for the rest of his life by blindness. It seems to me right that he should not be handicapped also by lack of ordinary education. When he has learned to read and write and speak English, some history and geography and arithmetic, and has perhaps matriculated, then we will consider how best to teach him to face the economic aspects of his future life.

But the main problem of St. Dunstan's is neither primary nor secondary education, but the education of adults in the art of being blind. Since most of the adults are young vigorous soldiers, sailors, and airmen in their early twenties, and since they have mostly left school at the age of fourteen or sixteen, some general education does come into the matter, and we have classes in English and History which are eagerly attended.

Typewriting is the first serious subject to be tackled. The typewriter might have been designed for the blind. It was, in fact, invented over two centuries ago by an American engineer, and from notes found among his private papers after his death, it is assumed that it was intended to print embossed letters for the blind. For more than one hundred years, machines, with embossed letters, enabled blind persons

to write, and it was not until 1855 that a typewriter was evolved which printed ordinary letters. Only then did business men realise its possibilities. It does automatically and accurately all the things that it is rather difficult to do with a pencil and paper if you cannot see. It takes the paper along so that the letters fall in their right place ; it turns the paper up to bring a new line into use ; it rings a bell at the end of the line ; it forms every letter perfectly, and it is extremely easy to learn. Most ordinary commercial typists learn to type without looking at the keys, so that their eyes may be free to look at the copy from which they are typing. So no special technique is required, either for the teaching of typewriting or for the typewriting itself. The sequence of the letters is learned by heart, the shape and nature of the machine is learned by feel, and the rest follows. The feel of the typewriter key is smooth, being made of ebonite or some similar composition. We generally put a little bit of very fine sand-paper on the surface of each of the three middle keys, namely, the Y, H, and N, so that should there be any doubt when you are typing quickly as to where your fingers are, a slight touch with the forefinger of either hand will tell you where the middle line comes. I personally prefer a little block on the outside keys, at the end of the row, that is to say on the fraction signs and the back spacer, and the other signs which I do not normally use, so that everything inside the blocks is known immediately by feel to be an active letter. Typists who have beautiful nails, with those sharp extended points that always seem to me to be so impracticable as well as inhospitable, sometimes buy little rubber caps which they stick on their typewriter keys—these prevent them from breaking their fragile nails. I find these little caps are exactly the right thing to put on the outside keys to mark my edges. After a very few lessons you may see a blinded soldier up at St. Dunstan's writing his first letter home, and that gives him an enormous thrill, and also his parents. It is the first positive, active, useful thing that he has found that he can do for himself, and its moral effect is very great indeed.

I always say that there are two distinct stages in the recovery of the blinded soldier, and the things that mark

these stages have become almost symbols—they are the braille watch and the typewriter. When first I visit a man in hospital I always give him a braille watch—this is an ordinary watch movement, with the glass removed, and a hunter lid to shut down and protect the face. The face has ordinary markings for the guidance of a seeing person, but it also has little raised dots round the outside edge—two dots at every quarter and one dot at every five minutes. The hands which are exposed are a little flatter and stronger than ordinary hands. Very quickly with your finger, or I prefer the thumb, you can feel the time. I have shown my watch to hundreds of blinded soldiers of the last war, and scores in this, and I have given each of them one for themselves. The pleasure it gives is enormous, and as I have said it is a symbol of victory over blindness, and it is recorded in the minds of every one of us that the first act of telling the time for oneself was an important milestone. Some weeks later came the writing of the first letter home on a typewriter. A few weeks after that the test was passed, and one felt that one had regained at least one of the faculties of which blindness had deprived one—to be able to write. Before leaving St. Dunstan's, after full training had been accomplished, the St. Dunstaner would have to go through a further typewriting test to see that he had improved his speed, maintained his accuracy, and learned how to take care of his typewriter. If he passed this satisfactorily, he would be presented with a typewriter which would be his for the rest of his life.

But it is not always the watch or the typewriter which first awakens interest in the conquest of blindness. Quite recently I had the experience of meeting the master of a Merchant Service vessel who was blinded by an accident. He had been some weeks recovering in India from the accident, and some months before he could return home. He had thus spent a considerable time as a blind man without anything to do and found it very hard. He was interested in all I could tell him about the future.

But the thing that immediately caught his fancy was the casual mention by me of a game of bridge in our first conversation. He happened to be a very keen bridge-player ;

he had invented a system of his own which he had taught to his shipmates and they had a team which had won matches all over the world. If he could play at bridge again he thought he would be happy. I told him about our braille cards, and gave him two packs. Before he had learned braille as a means of reading to himself he had mastered it as a means of playing bridge.

Different blind people have their own way of playing cards, but I personally hold my thirteen cards in my right hand, in a fan just like anyone else does, sorted into suits of course, and pick out the card that I want with my left thumb and forefinger. The braille markings for the number of card and suit are in the top left-hand and bottom right-hand corner, on the face of the card. When I pull out a card with my thumb and forefinger I feel the markings with my thumb. This is an almost instantaneous action and with skill the game is not held up at all.

Perhaps it is wise to start with a simple game like vingt-et-un, because of the small number of cards that must be read. Nap is also a very good game to start with because it involves the use of only five cards and includes all the elements of contract bridge, namely calling, leading, following suit, trumping, making tricks, and fulfilling a contract. If you are asked to make up a game of bridge, all the help you need give the blinded person is to keep the score, and call out " Dummy " when it is laid on the table. Different blind people may like the " Dummy " called in different ways, but it is well to adopt some regular system. The following manner is suggested : " Now here is Dummy. There are five Spades, the Ace, King, Queen, and two little ones ; four Hearts, the Jack, Nine, and two little ones ; one Diamond, the Three ; three Clubs, the Ten and two little ones." Generally there is no need at the early stage in the game to mention the actual names of the little cards, but if someone wants to know this he can ask you and you can tell him. When playing, each player calls out the name of the card as he puts it down. Do not let one person at the table call out all the cards. It is easier for the blind player if each person calls his own, as this indicates where the card comes from as

well as its suit and number. It is advisable for the person playing the hand to say " Ace of Spades from my hand ", or " Three of Spades from Dummy ", as the blind opponent may, for the moment, have forgotten where the lead ought to be, and it helps him to be reminded which side it is coming from. Do not preface every call by the words " Now I am going to play . . ." It is unnecessary and tedious.

While the typewriting lessons are going on, early braille lessons are arranged. There have been many different kinds of tactile type. From the beginning of the sixteenth century, methods were invented varying from engraved characters upon blocks of wood to pins stuck into cushions, but to Valentin Hauy goes the honour of being the first to see the possibilities of embossed paper. Hauy was not blind himself, but he took an interest in the blind to such an extent that he opened a school for them in 1784. To this school was to come many years later Louis Braille, the inventor of the system we use today. Louis Braille saw the superiority of a point system over all the other systems which had been tried throughout the past fifty years, some of which were fairly legible (Moon type was the most widely used before the advent of braille) but most of which were cumbersome. Braille devoted his attention to a point system which had been originated by a French artillery officer named Barbier. This, having twelve points instead of six, was complicated and covered a considerable amount of space. Young Braille studied the matter scientifically and ascertained that sixty-two possible combinations could be made with six points, and that letters could be formed from one to another by a comparatively simple rule.

The braille system has stood the test of time. It has been demonstrated that points stimulate the finger more readily than lines, and that quicker and easier reading can be achieved with a point system. Imagine the six of dominoes lying in front of you with the three dots in a vertical line and you have the cell which is the basis of the braille alphabet. Every letter and sign that is used is composed of one or more of these six dots—as I have said, there are sixty-two permutations and combinations of this sign, and they are used for the

letters of the alphabet and for simple words like *and*, *for*, *of*, *the*, *with* ; and for double letters like *wh*, *th*, and so on. Combinations of signs are used for syllables which occur frequently in words, and for little words, such as, for example, *-part*, *-ally*, *-ity*, *-tion*, *-sion*, *-ing*, and so on. So braille is in some respects a kind of shorthand, but it differs from office shorthand because it is accurate and not phonetic—by accurate I mean that the braille code reproduces exactly and literally every letter and comma and sign that appears in the ink-print. This is considered necessary because a great many young blind persons receive their education through the medium of braille, and if it were phonetic or inaccurate it would mislead them as to spelling and the composition of the words. Braille is hard to feel, especially for those whose hands have been used to manual work, and great patience and perseverance are required.

To those who have been used to reading a great deal, and whose minds are accustomed to active mental problems, braille does not present such a difficult task. It takes from three to nine months to read sufficiently to enjoy a book and go on by yourself. We are setting a higher standard than that obtained in the last war, and are devoting more time to braille. Experience has shown that this is desirable, and I think the standard of education of the young men of this generation is higher than that of the last war. To get the best results, both braille and typewriting must be taught individually, so if you go to St. Dunstan's you will see pupil and teacher sitting together at their lessons. This involves a very considerable staff of teachers, and a very great expense, even although some of them are volunteers.

Amongst the most successful teachers in these departments, and in many others at St. Dunstan's, are blinded soldiers of the Great War. I have a splendid team of seven blinded soldiers working at St. Dunstan's now. The head of the Massage class, who reads all his own textbooks in braille, prepares his own lectures, demonstrates to his pupils the skeleton which is part of their equipment, and shows them by practical experiment how they should undertake the various manipulations, is one ; the head of the Joinery shop, where

four or five benches are placed, and an equal number of blinded men may be seen any morning learning to plane and saw and nail, and make mortices and dovetails, and all the other tricks of that trade, is another. I often tell these young men that they must learn to cut their fingers and to hammer their own nails before they can learn not to do this. The head of the Basket shop is also blind—he looks after all his own raw materials, as well as designing new shapes of baskets and teaching his pupils ; and many of the braille and typewriting teachers are blind also.

Not only does the blind teacher have a very good effect upon his pupil because he demonstrates better than anyone else can that what he is teaching can in fact be done without sight, but also the splendid team of picked old St. Dunstaners of the last war has a most encouraging effect upon the young men of this war. They pass on to them something of the wonderful spirit of this Brotherhood of the Blind. To add to the contact between old St. Dunstaners and new, I arrange that each week or each week-end two beds shall be set aside to which old St. Dunstaners who have distinguished themselves in any way may come up as our guests, to mix with and, by example, to impart their knowledge of the blind world to the younger people. When I say men who have distinguished themselves in some field, I do not mean only professional men, or men belonging to any particular class : I regard a man as one who has distinguished himself if, out of the shattered life that was left to him at the end of the last war, he has made a happy home and himself a useful citizen. All ranks of the Armed Forces, of the Home Country and the Dominions and Allies who are here in the United Kingdom, all classes of the Home Defence and Air-Raid services, men and women alike, all religions and all races under the Crown, if blinded as a result of war service, can come to St. Dunstan's to learn to be blind. As a *Times* leader-writer once put it so admirably : St. Dunstan's is " a guild of men who share a considerable handicap but who share also the courage and discipline that they once offered to their country, and that enable them to face the struggle of life with unabated cheerfulness and confidence ".

9

BRAILLE AND TALKING BOOKS

Most communities produce their own magazines. The Regimental magazine, the Ship's magazine, the School magazine, the Parish magazine are examples. There are always to be found one or two who like to express themselves in writing, to record the current jokes about the personalities in the community, to list the successes and honours of those who achieve them, and to record the emotions, the more serious thoughts, and the humour of those around them. So the *St. Dunstan's Review* came into existence in July 1915. The first issue was quite a small house paper, with no pretensions at serious journalism, and only a few copies were circulated. But soon the growing community of St. Dunstan's sustained a more imposing organ, and from that day to the present time the monthly magazine has been published. It was started by William Girling, a St. Dunstaner, and continued by C. E. Rose, one-time Workshop Superintendent. It was carried on for a time by Richard King Huskinson, so well known to readers of the *Tatler* as Richard King, the writer of the weekly book review and philosophical essay called *With Silent Friends*.

Mr. Huskinson was a voluntary helper at St. Dunstan's in those days, and became what we called Adjutant, which was really a kind of organiser out of school hours in one of our great houses in Regent's Park. Writing about St. Dunstan's men at the time, he said :

> So long as the blinded man is not, as it were, thrust into a special world alone, he will always remain his normal self. So long as he feels that he is leading an average, normal life, so long will he be average normal. Rowing, dancing, walking, talking ; amusements such as theatres, concerts, lectures—in all these things his handicap is felt scarcely at all after the first bitter realisation. So long as he can indulge in these things as other men indulge in them, so long will he remain normal among other normal men. He will be silent and depressed occasionally—as we all are ; he will feel reckless and elated

for no apparent cause—as we are, too ; he will hope and fear, and hope again and despair—in the same way as most of us do these things, though, perhaps, each emotion will be a little more apparent. The greatest danger which besets him is that of being made to think too seriously and too long about his blindness. The chief thing to remember is that, living in darkness as he does, he cannot throw off evil thoughts as we can by change of scene ; he cannot find forgetfulness in watching and observing the life around him. Thus it is doubly necessary that all the things which he can indulge in should be found for him. *He must be brought into the life which surrounds him.* And he must be brought into this life as a man who, except for his handicap, is as full of hope and life and energy and forcefulness as any man ; who is equal, if not superior, to all those with whom he comes in contact.

Then I became Editor and remained so for some few years, after which a member of my staff took over the job.

Looking back over old numbers of the *St. Dunstan's Review* the other day, I was struck by the extraordinarily high content of technical matter in it. If there was anything about St. Dunstan's or about blindness that had a technical aspect, it would be mentioned and written about at some length. If ever there was a quarter of a column or half a page or even an inch or two at the bottom of a column left over that had to be filled up from outside, the matter would be about airplanes or railways or ships or inventions. In this sense I was probably a very bad Editor, because I was following my own bent in the belief that I was following that of my readers.

I am very technically minded, able to appreciate machinery and technical processes, and without doubt I should have been a technician of some kind, an electrician, an engineer, or a chemist. This technical interest led to my taking a very considerable interest in the technical aspects of blindness, and there are many. All kinds of machines and gadgets and devices have been invented to reduce the limitations of the handicap of blindness. Reference has already been made to braille and in this field there are many inventions.

There are two main sources of the supply of braille books, hand-written and stereotyped, or machine made. The

National Library for the Blind, which serves the whole of the United Kingdom, and a good many readers in overseas countries as well, with both types of books, has more than 220,000 volumes on its shelves. A body of voluntary workers, numbering many hundreds, write most of these books in braille for the Library. They make one copy at a time. In the old days these copies were made by a frame and single-pointed hand punch, and each dot had to be individually pressed through the die into the paper. It is recorded that an old blind man, by name Mr. Ford, who died a few years ago, brailled the whole of the Bible, in the course of which he had to make 20 to 21 million strokes. An ordinary short modern novel goes into three or four volumes. *David Copperfield* goes into twelve volumes, and to read it involves a finger-journey of about ten miles.

But now a braille writer is used which has six keys, and the whole of the braille character can be made at one stroke. This method is of the greatest value and many thousands of books are provided by it, and the individual taste of the voluntary writer enables a great variety of books, many of which are not popular, but are needed by individuals or small groups, to be put into braille. The National Institute for the Blind also runs a library similarly contributed to by voluntary writers—this is especially for students. Any student of almost any subject under the sun may get a book from this library, or if there is no volume to suit him, may ask that it should be put into braille. The book will be brailled by some specialist ; it may be on Chinese art, on some abstruse branch of law, or on astrology. Whatever the subject, it will be put into braille for him, but it will remain the property of the Library, and after he has finished with it, and has perhaps used it to study for an examination, it will go back into the Library and be available for the next student who wants it.

But the large bulk of braille is provided by what is called the stereotyping method—here the original is embossed not on paper, but on a double zinc plate. Generally speaking, blind operators work the machine because they are very skilled at braille writing, and from this plate, by

means of a heated press, any number of copies may be impressed upon paper. Rotary presses are also used for magazine production, and a considerable number of books and monthly and weekly magazines are available for blind people. During the year 1940–1941 the National Institute produced 19,595 bound volumes, 13,726 pamphlets, 322,076 newspapers, and 165,936 magazines, involving the embossing of 18,136 metal plates. War maps and war pamphlets were among the year's braille publications.

Pocket frames for writing braille notes, braille playing cards, a complete braille notation for the transcription into a touch-reading system of music, spur wheels and rulers and dividers and other instruments for making charts and maps—all these are inventions and devices which make braille of use in a variety of directions.

Early in 1918 Sir Arthur Pearson asked me if I would join the Council of the National Institute for the Blind. This body was the primary producer of braille and publishing house in the Empire, and he had become its president early in 1914 before the war. I naturally took a considerable interest in technical matters, and very soon suggested the setting up of a sub-committee to investigate inventions and devices for the blind, and became its first chairman.

After a few months it occurred to me to make a rather interesting experiment in connection with braille. It is not on record how the size of the braille character was originally determined, but presumably it was guessed at by some technician or other who was making braille, and the original standard size had been adopted generally and had become more or less universal. It seemed to me that this particular character was just a little high, so that the finger in traversing a line of characters would sometimes have to travel up and down a little to ascertain the meaning. In the course of reading a volume of braille, this up-and-down or sinuous travelling of the finger would add very considerably to its journey, and thus to the time and effort that was required. I was told by all the experts and by those who had been reading braille for years, that if you reduced the character the ordinary reader who was not very skilled would not be

able to manage it. I was not convinced about this, and in order to get a completely unprejudiced view of the matter, we suddenly one week published a very popular magazine in a type which was seven-eighths of the size of the original. Out of more than a thousand readers only three wrote in and asked what had happened to the type. We had saved by this method between 15 and 20 per cent of paper as well as reducing the time of reading and the cost of production.

I remained chairman of this committee for a few years, and am still a member of it. An extraordinary variety of inventions have been considered, and many of them approved and brought into use. There are improved braille machines which write upwards so that you can feel what you have written as you go along ; there are braille scales for typewriters which enable you to feel the particular position on the carriage at which you are going to strike a letter, so that you can make columns or set out an address as it should be set out ; there are special rulers for the blind on which they can measure in inches and even in eighths and tenths of an inch ; there is a gadget for keeping the score at bridge ; a needle which you can thread without seeing the hole.

One of the problems of providing inventions or apparatus for the blind is the lack of numbers and the lack of money in the blind world. Although there are over seventy thousand blind people in the United Kingdom, the great majority of them are old people who cannot learn braille and who cannot learn to use apparatus. Only a relatively small number have the aptitude to use apparatus or the money to buy it, and the consequence is that almost any invention has to be subsidised very heavily before it can be brought into use. One of the very few pieces of special apparatus for the blind that can be produced without a great subsidy is playing cards. When I first entered the blind world playing cards were made by hand, and almost every player had his own system. I set to work to reconcile these and to try and devise a system which would be universal and standard. The cards are marked on the face in the left-hand top corner and the bottom right-hand corner, exactly the same place as the little marks which denote the suit and number which appear

on all conventional cards. Having worked out an efficient system of marking, we had dies made so that a whole pack of cards could be pressed at one time. We bought the cards wholesale, put the braille on them, and sold them retail, and the difference between the wholesale and the retail price paid for the brailling. Thus a blind person can obtain his pack of cards at exactly the same price as a sighted person obtains his pack in a stationer's shop.

In St. Dunstan's all kinds of devices were invented by members of our staff to facilitate our men's work. There are the guides and formers which are used to build up the walls of a basket as it is being made. There are the jigs and guides which are made by the joiners to enable them to cut their joints cleanly. There is the special foot-rule to which I have already made reference. The boot-repairer has a little tool with which he can make the holes round the edge of the leather of the sole neatly spaced, so that when he puts the brads in and gives them a tap they will make a perfect job. There are the special guides which enable a mat-maker to weave a letter or a series of letters into his mat as he makes it, and there are many other similar dodges, most of them simple, all of them clever, which overcome the handicap of blindness.

As early as 1919 the Columbia Gramophone Company and Pathephone Company were good enough to make experiments at my suggestion in the recording of speech on gramophone disks with the idea that they would read aloud to the blind. By running a disk a little slower than the normal and cutting the threads a little closer together, we managed to make a record run first of all for six minutes, then for ten minutes. These were really the first talking-book records, and were the first beginnings of the Talking Book, which is now so well known in this country and in the United States. Sometime in the 1920's I met an inventor who had made a film talk. He was trying to sell his invention to the film companies, but they would have nothing to do with it. The silent film was too strongly entrenched, and in the technical journals of this industry the idea that a film could ever talk was ridiculed. "The public will not

want to be talked at ", said these journals in their leading articles ; " The essence of the art of cinematography is the visual image ", " The silent picture is the proper method of expression of this particular art ", and so on. This was not the whole truth of course, and those who went to the cinema in those days will remember that although the picture was silent the entertainment was not, because they provided in the cheaper and smaller places a pianist, and in the larger places an orchestra or an organ, and sought by playing suitable music to make an accompaniment to the silent picture. However, I saw in the talking film a possible way to realise my dream of a Talking Book Library, and I had a piece of film made. But these early experiments with the gramophone and with the film, though they promised satisfaction, nevertheless could not be brought to fruition. And the reason was that electrical recording had not been perfected. It was not until many years later that electrical recording became sufficiently perfect to sweep away from all recording studios the old mechanical method.

When first we went to make our talking records the readers had to speak directly into a trumpet ; the sound waves going down the trumpet vibrated a diaphragm upon which was a needle to cut the wax. To get enough force to cut the wax you had to speak right into the trumpet, and the resonance of the system led to extremely difficult and bad reproduction. Directly, however, the electrical method came into use it was possible to control the voice after it had entered the system through the microphone and take it on to the wax in exactly the form, and shape, and at exactly the power that was required. Not only that, but you could fake the voice—you could, for example, cut out all the deeper chest tones, and these chest tones when recorded take up more room on the wax than the higher tones, the middle register, and the consonants. One way and another, by experimenting in a laboratory which I set up at St. Dunstan's, we found a way to make a gramophone record which normally runs at 78 revolutions a minute and lasts for about $3\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, to continue for 25 minutes on one side only. We made it go round at 24 revolutions a minute, and we cut the threads

at 200 to the inch instead of 100 to the inch, which is the standard. A considerable number of experiments to find the right material for the records, to find the right needles which would last for 25 minutes, to find out how to make the speech clear at the centre of the record where it was apt to get rather muffled, to devise a simple and cheap machine which the blind person could have in his own home to play the records to him—all this experimental and research work went on intensively, and eventually in 1934 we were able to produce the first talking book experimentally and circulate it to a dozen blind people to try.

Within five years, with the very generous help of Lord Nuffield, the National Institute for the Blind and St. Dunstan's, working in co-operation, have put this new invention on its feet. There are now 394 books in our Library, which include 105,000 records. There are 1340 reader-listeners in this country, and a number of sub-libraries have been started in different parts of the Empire.

Simultaneously a Talking Book project grew up in the United States, on the initiative and under the direction of Mr. Robert B. Irwin, a notable blind man, Director of the American Foundation for the Blind in New York. I have exchanged visits and technical and other views with him. Their technique is very similar to ours, and we exchange records with them.

The talking book is without question one of the most important modern inventions for the blind. The pleasure it gives to those who cannot read braille, and also to those who can, is incalculable. The choosing of books for the Library is a very interesting matter. As chairman of the Sound Recording Committee I also had the duty to take the chair at a sub-committee which would select the books. If you are going to record forty books a year, which was our programme in peace-time, what forty would you choose? We had, to help us, Major-General " Ian Hay " Beith, the novelist, and Mr. E. E. Mavrogordato, who is an old personal friend of mine and of St. Dunstan's, and who has contributed reviews for many years to a leading literary periodical. Later Ian Hay took the chair of this committee for a time.

We started by choosing what we thought would be suitable for recording—books that were not too long, books that were varied in their nature, classics, fiction (divided into detective stories and thrillers on the one hand and novels on the other). Writing of those early days in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Mr. Mavrogordato said :

" TALKING BOOKS "

New Library for the Blind

Machines which will read aloud to the blind books recorded on disks of the gramophone pattern are being manufactured and will be available in the early autumn. The records will form part of a circulating library of " talking books ".

We are all apt to invoke the " General Reader " as sharing our preferences or endorsing our antipathies, but what do we really know of his tastes ? Suppose that in return for all his loyal, though tacit, support we were called upon to consult him ?

Suppose that a ship strikes a reef, and that all on board, passengers and crew, men and women, young and old, with nothing in common but their misfortune, are to be marooned for ever on a desert island ; suppose that a box to hold some two dozen books is to be floated ashore to them, " Swiss Family Robinson " fashion ; suppose it rests with us to choose the books. Which books shall we choose ?

The marooned are the blind—70,000 of them ; the beneficent current is the trend of invention, culminating in " Talking Books " and quickened by most generous help from Lord Nuffield ; those who must choose are the National Institute for the Blind and St. Dunstan's, who are co-operating for this purpose. It needs little imagination to appreciate the boon to the blind, and the responsibility of being the instrument for transmitting it to them. It may be thought, especially by those who habitually turn to books for gifts, that choosing would be not only pleasant but easy. But it is not so easy. The present is chosen not for the general reader but for a particular reader ; he trusts in chariots and we give him something by Sir Malcolm Campbell, in horses and we give him " Tschiffely's Ride ".

But there is no guide to the tastes of the blind recipients, for they comprise all classes of the community. They range from the book-lover who, with the coming of blindness, has been bereft of a lifelong companionship to those who are strangers to reading to a degree hardly possible of comprehension to the sighted. The Talking Book may be regarded by those who receive it as an old friend returned

from the dead, or a new friend bearing gifts undreamed of. There is in this no ingratitude to the kindly reader-aloud, for there are times when he is not free to offer his service ; the Talking Book is always prepared to do its office. Nor does it forget braille. Braille will always be needed for educational purposes, both as a means of reading and writing ; and it remains pre-eminent for those who are interested in literature in the specific sense and wish to linger over passages that appeal to them. But braille is difficult to acquire in later years, and of the adult blind not more than 20 per cent have learned to read by touch.

The initial difficulty of selection takes shape after a glance at the categories in any publisher's catalogue. Biography, children's books, classics—in the wide sense—economics, essays and *belles-lettres*, fiction, history, poetry and drama, religion and theology, politics, science, travel—two from each of these and the box is full. If some less democratic method be adopted, is the preference to be given to enlightenment, information, or entertainment ? Are the interests to be consulted those of the literary few or of the greater number who read for the story ? It will help to account for the choice made to explain that it was limited by practical considerations —among them length, cost, and suitability for reading aloud. The records would be lent free of charge, but they would circulate only in households able to afford the machines. A novel of average length—90,000 words—would require eight two-sided disks. Each disk would read for 25 minutes.

The first title on the list below will suggest the problem in epitome. With only one disk available for the Bible, only one Book from it could be included. In other words, all the Books but one had to be subjected to what might seem the stigma of exclusion. Either the Old Testament or the New had to be omitted. With the choice narrowed down to the New Testament and a Gospel, what were the arguments that should prevail against the claims of St. Luke and its appeal to the General Reader ? As it happened they were never formulated. The British and Foreign Bible Society having generously offered to defray the cost of St. John, his Gospel became the Bible selection without discussion.

Subject to the granting of permission by owners of copyright, the first Talking Books will be taken from the following list. The books on the list are not put forward as the best books, but as those reckoned the best under the conditions, preference having been given to books with an interest of more than one kind :

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

POETRY. One side of the disk to be given to famous speeches from Shakespeare.

The Pilgrim's Progress. Part I. By John Bunyan.
The Story of San Michele. By Axel Munthe.
Disraeli. By André Maurois.
The World Crisis. By Winston Churchill.
Chapter on Social Conditions in the Seventeenth Century. From *History of England*, by Macaulay.
Shakespeare. By Sir Walter Raleigh.
Boswell's Johnson. (Abridged.)
In the Steps of the Master. By H. V. Morton.
An English Journey. By J. B. Priestley.
A Selection of Short Stories.
Henry Esmond. By W. M. Thackeray.
Cranford. By Mrs. Gaskell.
The Cricket on the Hearth. By Charles Dickens.
Kim. By Rudyard Kipling.
Typhoon. By Joseph Conrad.
The First Hundred Thousand. By Ian Hay.
The Scarlet Pimpernel. By Baroness Orczy.
The Time Machine. By H. G. Wells.
The Thirty-nine Steps. By John Buchan.
Death at Broadcasting House. By Val Gielgud.
The Prisoner of Zenda. By Anthony Hope.
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. By Agatha Christie.
There's Death in the Churchyard. By William Gore.

Before the decision was arrived at a number of blind readers were canvassed. The lists submitted by them, while negatively helpful in indicating what was not wanted, were too diverse for positive guidance. It may mitigate the asperity of the comments, which will be the portion of the selectors, to quote the last sentence in the reply of a general reader consulted: "But no poetry, and no prose".

But we very soon found that our own views either as individuals or as a committee were not really what was wanted. What we wanted to know was what books were popular. And so we found out through trade channels what books were best sellers. We decided that the book of the month was a very doubtful proposition—it might only last for a month and then never be heard of again. But the book which was a best seller during, say, its first year and perhaps also during its second year, such a book must have some real merit in its class. We found a quarterly magazine called *The Author*. This quarterly publication recorded the

best sellers quarter by quarter, and we came to the conclusion that if a book maintained its position amongst the first dozen best sellers for each of the four quarters of its first year, and say two or three of the quarters of its second year, then it was well worth our while putting it on our list.

The method of reading is of some interest. It is not desirable that the reader's voice and personality shall come between author and listener. Nor do we want our book-reading to be altered in character to simulate play-acting. We want monotony in one sense and yet sufficient variation, character portrayal, and emphasis to maintain interest and make the aural presentation clear. We are indebted to Anthony McDonald, film commentator and later B.B.C. producer, for a great deal of help in the experimental work which determined the best way of reading, and for reading many books.

But apart from him we had much difficulty in finding suitable readers. All sorts of people were tried—parsons and actors and professional men and women—but we finally came to the conclusion that the professional reader would be the best. He would be most likely to read easily and well and with just the right amount of emphasis and character portrayal. For some years now the leading British Broadcasting Corporation announcers have been our principal readers. We have to express our gratitude to the Corporation for allowing them to undertake this work—though of course it is done in their spare time and not at the Corporation's expense. Alvar Liddel, Bruce Belfrage, Joseph Macleod, Lionel Gamlin, Patrick Curwen, Alan Howland, and many others are regular readers in our Library. They go up to St. Dunstan's in Regent's Park, which is handy for the B.B.C., and in a little beautifully-made studio there they record their books. They work for a session lasting about two hours, during which time they make three sides each of 25 minutes' duration. The waxes go to His Master's Voice or to Decca, who transfer them by their own process on to a copper master. A first pressing is taken, which comes back to us; this is listened to by a blinded soldier, who acts as proof-reader,

and when it is approved, fifty copies of the record are made for use in our Library here and for distribution to some of the Dominions.

The record has a braille die on one side of it, giving the name of the book and the number of the record in braille, and a printed label on the other side. A short novel goes on ten double-sided records, a medium-sized novel on fifteen, and longer books may go up to as many as forty or fifty records. Owing to the bulkiness of the braille package, the Government has for many years permitted the posting of braille books at the specially low rate of 1d. a book. A similar concession was granted for talking books, so that a packet of ten or fifteen records in a box, specially made to stand the rigours of the journey, may go through the post for an almost nominal fee, and this contributed in no small measure towards making the Library an economic possibility.

A simple electric or mechanical gramophone is the machine that is used to read the records in the home. This cost between £5 and £6 in peace-time, and consisted of an electrical turntable, a single-valve amplifier, a pick-up and loud-speaker, placed in a neat cabinet like a portable radio. In the earlier days of this invention, a blinded soldier wrote to me expressing himself about it in the following terms :

January 11th, 1936

DEAR SIR IAN,—This is how I enjoy the Talking Book.

Every night at about ten o'clock I shoot the wife off to bed, then make up the fire, draw my armchair near, and, after having got a bottle of Worthington and a cigarette going, I switch on the Talking Book.

Don't you think this is real luxury ?

If the book is particularly interesting, it is possible I may have another disk and another Worthington, retiring to bed about midnight, taking care to replace disk in box and empties in proper place.

I have only read two books and thoroughly enjoyed each. Not being able to sleep much, and being very poor at braille, you can imagine how useful the Talking Book is to me.

Please thank those who have given me assistance and advice. They ought to have a monument three times the size of Nelson's.

Yours truly,

F. G. BRAITHWAITE

The following speeds which I have had fairly accurately worked out may be of interest. The elementary test in braille reading which is passed by almost every blinded soldier works out at the rate of 15·5 words per minute ; the advanced test which they pass a little later on works out at 26 words per minute. The reading of an ordinary B.B.C. News Bulletin averages 135 words and that for the talking book averages 150 words a minute. And this reminds me that a very remarkable blind man, by name Mr. Arthur Lloyd, once proposed to me that he could read a talking book ; so earnest was he, and so anxious am I always to make experiments, that I invited him to London, and he impressed me so much that we allowed him to make a talking book, and he made two or three for us. If you sat and listened to his recording of Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, you would be quite amazed and would not believe that it was a blind man reading, until at the end of two or three hundred words you heard a very slight pause, and a rustle as he turns over the page, rather like the rustle made by the B.B.C. announcer when he is reading the News. It takes him just the fraction of a second to go over the page and find the top line of the next page—there is no such gap with a sighted reader. This blind man sat down and did his job just like a sighted reader. He read three sides at a session—a most remarkable piece of work.

An interesting point about talking books is that of copyright. The instinct of authors and publishers was, of course, to let the blind have the use of their books just as freely as they have always allowed their works to be put into braille, but whereas braille is applicable only to the blind world, this new invention of the talking book might have a future the extent of which could not at present be foreseen ; so some anxiety entered into the matter, and meetings of publishers and authors were held to consider what should be done. Eventually great goodwill and generosity prevailed over doubts, and for a nominal fee, to put the matter on a legal basis and to confine its use to the blind only, permission is given for any book which we have wanted to record.

In the course of my early recording experiments I had

some very interesting and amusing times. I used to work personally in the laboratory with the recording engineer who was doing the experiments. I used to say bits of poetry or prose, or make up speeches or anything to provide the reading matter, and he would record on disks a short piece at a time and then we would play it back and see how our experiment was progressing. It is very surprising when you hear your own voice played back to you for the first time. You say, "Well, I had no idea my voice was like that!" Although of course it is clearly recognisable to all your friends, *you* would not know it was your voice until you had become accustomed to hearing it.

I had one machine which recorded the voice on a moving steel wire. It was a simpler edition of the Blattnerphone used by the B.B.C. In this machine the wire could be made to play backwards, so that one could hear one's own speech backwards. This was very surprising and unnatural—it sounded like a foreign language and yet a language one had never heard before—a mixture between, shall we say, monkey language and some quite inhuman language. The idea then occurred to me to isolate one or two words, as, for example, my own name, and to hear them backwards over and again until I had got the cadence and sounds into my mind. I would then record this sound, and next time when it was replayed backwards it would come out intelligibly, but curiously distorted because of the difficulty of completely mimicking the sound in the original recording.

Up to the outbreak of the war I kept in touch personally and with my technical men with any development which took place in sound recording by any medium. There was the film as used in the cinemas, there was the wire to which I have already made reference, there was the Phillips-Miller system whereby a piece of black synthetic film is cut by a sapphire, and there are all the various kinds of material which are used for disk recording. Always we were looking out for methods of recording which would pack more simply, be sturdy and robust and cheap to produce, which would be better in fact than our present system using the disk. The conclusion I came to as a result of searching over many

years for the best method was this—unless and until some new method supersedes the flat disk for ordinary home use, the flat disk will be the means for us.

I have already mentioned that inventions for the blind and special apparatus for the blind suffer from the great disadvantage that only small numbers are required, and that the cost of production per unit is therefore very high. Having this in mind it will be seen that for a talking book system for the blind, for which only a few thousand machines would be wanted, and only a few scores of books a year, you must use a method which is already in common use — gramophone turntables, single-valve amplifiers, small loud-speakers, pick-ups, all these are apparatus commonly used in the radio industry, and therefore manufactured by thousands or even tens of thousands. And the disk record is commonly used also, so that although we require only small numbers of it, the thing we require is already being made for commercial purposes. Any special apparatus to play films would be complicated and costly if made in small numbers. Indeed any apparatus that departed from standard practice or standard components would be entirely out of the question. So my own belief is that the disk will continue for a long time to be the method which we shall find most practical and economical; but who knows, war is a great time for inventions, and the inventions called forth for the purpose of blowing property and human beings to pieces have a way of turning themselves to more agreeable and useful ends when peace returns. There was no time when inventions were more abundant than in the last war, and the technical progress which followed it afterwards was quite amazing. I have no doubt that this will occur again, and we shall keep sharp eyes on the look-out for any method which may enable us to improve the talking book.

10

I ENTER PUBLIC LIFE

By the beginning of 1921 I had built up the After-Care organisation from small beginnings into a considerable department of St. Dunstan's. I had many other activities in connection with the Council and Committee work of the National Institute for the Blind, and I was fulfilling a number of public engagements, speaking on behalf of St. Dunstan's. It was a surprise to me that I had any gift for public speaking, but the more I did of it, the easier it became, and though I never was and am not now a good speaker, I do find it possible to express myself clearly and briefly. I suppose it was the use of this power in a small way that led directly to my entering public life, though I had probably been interested in it by reading Fawcett's Life some years before, soon after I was blinded, and by reading about the 1919 election. I had not taken any interest in politics whatever, and my first concern was when election addresses began to be delivered at my house in 1919. I read them all and also the many articles in the newspapers, but cannot remember that I took sides. I did not vote for I was not on the register.

But by the beginning of 1921 I had developed a considerable interest in politics, though even then I had not chosen a party to belong to. My father had lived all his life in South Africa ; I am not aware that he had any political leanings, but looking back now with some knowledge of the history of South Africa during the years he was there, I should imagine he would have been a Conservative if only because he was in the Transvaal at the time when Mr. Gladstone's Government handed this British colony back to the Dutch and permitted the setting-up of a republic. No doubt my father, like all other Englishmen and Scotsmen in the Transvaal at the time, felt that they had been let down by the English Liberal Government. But I didn't know about all this when I was myself a young man forming political opinions.

I read a book on conservatism and another on liberalism and I read a book on economics. I read the literature of the Municipal Reform Party, the Progressive Party, and the Labour Party, in regard to London politics. I think I came to the unbiased opinion that I favoured the Conservative, or Municipal Reform as it was called in local government, policy above the other two, and I made some enquiries.

The senior member on St. Dunstan's Committee was Colonel Eric Ball, then a member of the London County Council and a very good friend of mine. He took me to see Sir George Hume, the leader of the Council on the Municipal Reform side, and I consulted him about getting a constituency. I had decided to try and enter the London County Council in the election which was to take place in the spring of 1922. What I had read and the advice I had received had shown me that this was a possible way of getting into Parliament ; at any rate the expense of a London County Council election was within my means, and it would provide me with experience in electioneering and in public life. There was a vacancy in North St. Pancras—a constituency which spread from the Britannia, Camden Town, up to Highgate—within a mile or so of where I lived. This seat had been Liberal for very many years, I think ever since the London County Council was first founded at the beginning of the century, and the Liberals had a majority of something over two thousand votes. However, the party managers with their usual optimism told me that the seat might be won, and encouraged me to try and secure the nomination. I secured it and won the seat with a substantial majority.

Thus I had my first experience of the very embarrassing business of going before a selection committee with a view to becoming a candidate. The London County Council is the largest Municipal Authority in the world—it governs the area known as the County of London, in which live something over four million people, and it is composed of about sixty Parliamentary constituencies each of which sends two members to the London County Council. So an L.C.C. election is similar to a Parliamentary election in many respects. The constituency is the same, and party and political issues are

the order of the day. The Conservatives in London run under the name of the Municipal Reform Party, and it is the Conservative Association in the constituency that approves the candidates.

Two or three years later in 1924 the Member of Parliament for North St. Pancras retired, and I sought the candidature for Parliament there, and in 1940 I sought the candidature for the Lonsdale division of Lancaster, so I have had some experience of seeking nomination.

There may be from ten to thirty thousand voters who normally vote Conservative in any particular constituency, depending upon its size and character, but only a very small proportion of these, perhaps from one to five thousand, are really sufficiently interested in politics to take a continuous interest in-between election times, and to subscribe to and sustain an association for the promotion of the Conservative viewpoint. They form themselves into what is generally called the Conservative or the Unionist, or the Conservative and Unionist Association. At their annual meeting they elect an executive committee, consisting of fifty or more people, and this is the body which selects and approves the candidate before he can submit himself to the electorate as the official Conservative candidate. The procedure is something like this. You notify the chairman, or the party notifies the chairman, that you would like to be considered for nomination. He interviews you, and perhaps your wife too, and sizes you up. He ascertains privately from you that you will pay your election expenses, that you will subscribe to the Association itself, and that you are prepared to take an active part in the life of the constituency and take the job seriously. If he is satisfied with this preliminary interview he will invite you to go before a selection committee, which may consist of from five to ten people, chosen by the executive committee, and there you will find two or three other candidates who are on what is called " the short list ", having been provisionally selected from the long list of forty or fifty aspirants.

On the appointed day you and the other victims will appear at the office and will be told to sit in a waiting-room ; you will look at each other or talk to each other with a certain

malicious interest ; you will hope that the other fellows are more nervous than you are ; the palms of your hands will get wet if you are new to the game, and you will wipe them on the seat of your trousers hoping that nobody is noticing you. Then suddenly the agent will come in and will ask one of you to go in ; probably the room in which the selection committee is sitting is next door, and those who are left will wonder if they will be able to hear what the man inside is saying. You'll probably be there about a quarter of an hour. You won't really make a speech, but will explain why you want to stand for this constituency, tell them something of your views informally, and they will ask you questions. It's easy enough to get a speech ready—you can always ask a friend who has done it before to help you, but to give an intelligent answer to the questions is much more difficult. Politics cover such a wide field that it is impossible for the newcomer to know what is expected of him, and if you have no previous political experience to guide you, you run the risk of falling into some frightful traps. But the members of the selection committee are ordinary English men and women, some retired people, some in the professions, some tradesmen, some artisans and workers of different kinds—they will know that you are new to the game, and unless one or other of them wants to catch you out in order to favour the chances of another candidate whom he is particularly keen to have, they will treat you kindly enough. Perhaps they will ask you to wait and you will go back and sit in the little waiting-room for perhaps an hour and a quarter while the other three or four candidates go through the same ordeal. By this time you will all have returned to the waiting-room, and you'll begin to talk to each other even more nervously about the weather and the news of the day and perhaps about your chances.

Very probably the selection committee will be unable to make up its mind positively and out of the three or four who have presented themselves two will be chosen to go before the executive. This is a more formal performance, and far more worrying. Very much the same procedure is followed, except that when you get into the executive, which, as I have

said, may be as many as fifty or a hundred persons, you are expected to make a fairly full political speech, and to answer an even wider variety of questions. You wonder whether you have made a good impression with your speech, you wonder whether they liked the look of you, you wonder whether you wore the right clothes, and whether your wife wore the right clothes. North St. Pancras was what was called a working-class constituency, and I remember wondering whether to go looking as smart as I could, or just the opposite. My wife and I decided to go smartly but soberly dressed, and I expect this was the right choice. In our anxiety we thought this matter very important, but perhaps it was not. At any rate I was chosen by the executive.

But the process is not finished yet—a week or two later a general meeting of the Association is summoned. All of the members may be present at this, but probably only two or three hundred come. *Now* you are not in competition with anyone else, you are the chosen nominee of the executive, and you alone go before the general meeting to obtain their confirmation. You are commended by the chairman, you get up and make a full political speech, you answer questions, and if all goes well, you are adopted prospective candidate unanimously.

You have started on the road towards one of the most interesting, one of the most satisfying, and perhaps one of the most difficult of human activities, that of a representative of the people in a democratic assembly.

Does a blind candidate get sentimental support from a selection committee or an executive at the time of nomination, or from the electorate at the time of election? If so, how great a factor is this? These are very interesting questions to which I have given a great deal of thought. Of course your opponent, that is to say, the man who did not get the nomination when you did or the man who did not win the election when you did, will certainly say that you received sentimental votes. Or if by any chance he is quite an exceptional person who makes no excuses for himself, then almost certainly his supporters, or some of them, will say it.

To examine this question as objectively as possible we must

be sure that we know exactly what we are talking about. Votes may be sentimental or rational, or a mixture of the two. Any candidate may attract sentimental votes—a good-looking man may attract women's votes, particularly young women's votes ; an old soldier may attract old soldiers' votes ; a Jew may attract Jewish votes, or a Roman Catholic, Roman Catholic votes. I suppose we will all agree that the young attractive bachelor candidate who gets votes from young and pretty girl electors is getting sentimental votes, but it's by no means certain that the old soldiers who vote for an old soldier candidate, or the co-religionists who vote for their nominee, are indulging wholly in sentiment. They may have a feeling for him because he's one of them, but they've also got a shrewd idea in the back of their minds that he will particularly look after their interests.

I think that on this basis old soldiers certainly voted for me, partly out of good feeling because we had been comrades together, and partly because they thought I would particularly look after their interests—a thing I proclaimed I would do, and have tried to do throughout my Parliamentary career. I think that some blind people would naturally vote for me for similar reasons, but I do not think that the ordinary electors would do so, unless some other sentiment than mere pity was in their minds. The electorate is very shrewd—it has, at election times, a strong sense of public duty guided by its own interest or what it conceives to be its own interest. It would not, I think, vote for a blind candidate or some other candidate who had a disability which was likely to impede his doing his duty properly. But if a blind candidate does well, if he produces a good election address, if he addresses meetings well, deals with hecklers satisfactorily, plays the part of candidate without anything going amiss, and seems to be overcoming his blindness, then he probably attracts a certain measure of extra support. I do not think this is sentimental in the sense that it comes from pity. I think it is more likely to be due to admiration of a kind : admiration for the fact that he is standing at all and for the fact that he gets on well, and should this view be taken of the blind candidate, the uniqueness of his position, curiosity about him,

and the fact that he will be much talked about, may help him. Supposing he happens to " score off " a heckler particularly well, he will probably get a good deal more credit for what he has done than would an ordinary candidate. People will say, " He's full of fight. Did you see how he floored that chap at the back ? He knew what sort of a chap he was. I wonder how he knew ? " and so on.

I have just used the words " floor that chap at the back ". It is legitimate to " score off " and if possible " floor " a questioner who is clearly out to trip you and has come there for that very purpose, and the audience appreciate it and probably have a good laugh at his expense and in your favour. But it is very unwise to treat the majority of questioners like this. You should assume that they are friends, not enemies, unless it is quite obvious to the audience that they are trying to trip you up. It is a good rule never, or hardly ever, to be sharp with a questioner. He may be well liked and have many friends, and the audience may think you are being unfair or patronising or sarcastic. " Don't be 'sarky' ! ", they will say.

Human nature is so constituted that the unusual is always more likely to be interesting, and if you have a blind candidate who excites admiration, his qualities are probably exaggerated in his favour. To this extent he probably has an advantage, but be it observed, only if he has secured it for himself by his merits ; and it must always be remembered that blindness is really a very great handicap, however you may learn to overcome it. It follows therefore that if the candidate does get over his difficulties, does put across his case so as to impress the electors, he has probably got something in him that takes him out of the ordinary rut and justifies his receiving additional personal support.

I have won four contested elections and have been returned once in an uncontested election, and have lost one election. I am not claiming any very special merit for myself, but I am making this case in regard to the blind candidate because I think it is due to anyone who is blind and who seeks any office that this question of the sentimental vote should be properly understood.

By and large I believe most wholeheartedly in the decency of mankind. I think our electorates are shrewd, good-humoured, and kindly, and it is generally speaking the electorate as a whole that decides elections; but all of us have a bit of the old Adam in us, and the strong party men ardently backing up their candidate sometimes fall from grace, and use devices and say things against the other candidate which they are probably heartily ashamed of afterwards. No doubt for a time during elections we all fall from grace; we exaggerate our differences with the other fellow; we paint a rosy picture of the future provided that we and our party are returned; we prophesy gloom and disaster if our opponent and his party are returned. We invite the electors to believe that everything must be black or white. This is a necessary part of the political game as it is played in a democracy, and is not wholly a bad one. Everything depends upon the electorate being educated in political affairs and being able to discriminate between forceful presentation of a case and pure humbug, but the temptation to fall from grace is strong and as a result of it unpleasant things are sometimes said, and it is almost always said by somebody of the blind candidate that he is out for sentimental votes. It is thought to create a prejudice against him on this account. For instance, in one of my elections my political opponent produced a blind man who belonged to the opposite party and put him up on every platform to talk me down, to try and engender class feeling against me. This prejudice has its effect no doubt, but my impression is that it did him much more harm than good.

With all this in mind and also because it seemed to me more proper and more in good taste, I took enormous pains throughout my election campaigns not to lay myself open to the charge that I was taking advantage of my disability in any way. In appearing before the selection committee for the first time I made some reference to blindness. It seemed to me necessary to say something, not to excite sympathy, but to deal with what was obviously a genuine question that must be in their minds. A blind man is not a very familiar figure and almost certainly the members of a selection

committee would not previously have given consideration to the question of adopting one as a candidate. How could he do his job? Briefly and in the most matter-of-fact way I explained this matter, and passed on to political subjects.

Apart from this kind of reference when first I was interviewed, I never made any reference whatever to the subject of my blindness in any public meeting, except on the rare occasion upon which I was challenged about it. As I have indicated people fall from grace at election times, and some of my political opponents used to come round and start up a cry at my meeting that I was trying to obtain sympathetic votes. I would deal with these people very shortly by the simple statement that I was not seeking their votes because I was blind, but in spite of it, and I would add with calmness in my voice, " Don't you suffer from the delusion, my friend, that I can't see right through you ! " Generally some phrase of this sort disposed of the matter, and I heard no more of it during that meeting.

I have mentioned this matter not because it bulked largely in any election that I fought, but because it did happen occasionally, and because I have frequently thought about it.

I took great pains to avoid any feeling on the part of my audiences that I was asking for any consideration from them. I addressed many rowdy meetings, meetings in which they sang " The Red Flag ", tried to count me out with that Big Ben business—when they sing the chimes of Big Ben and then try and count you out, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, OUT. Such organised interruption is extremely difficult to deal with, and there is a tendency for a chairman, being restless, and thinking that he can handle the matter when you cannot, to rise in his place and call for order. Sometimes this is effective, not because he has any greater power over the audience than you have, but merely because it's a change for him to rise in his place, and in ordinary circumstances it's perfectly proper for the chairman to rise and call for order ; but I never allowed it in my case, because there was always the

risk that the audience would think, or purport to think, that he was calling for order for me on some sympathetic ground, and he might even make the error of saying so. Such a slip I always thought would have been very harmful. Perhaps I exaggerated this matter but I was a little sensitive about it, and I always said to my chairman when a noisy meeting was in prospect, " On *no* account get up and call for order. Leave the audience to me."

North St. Pancras was a very rowdy constituency—they took their politics seriously, and the opposition got very worked-up about it. It is strange what things people will do during election time. I have been called, variously, a traitor, and even a lavatory—statements like these would tend to make most men very angry, but I was philosopher enough to know that these words, curiously irrelevant as they were, did not convey in the circumstances the usual meaning. " Traitor " said by an angry partisan at an election meeting merely means " You belong to the opposite party to me, I don't want to vote for you, and I wish to persuade the rest of this audience not to do so either, because I disapprove of you ". And " lavatory " merely means the same thing—with less political significance. Now you may say that I have a thick skin—perhaps that's true. You have to develop a certain kind of armour to protect you at election times. But I prefer to say that I had a great sensibility, and that I understood the minds of the people against whom I was opposed, for I knew that they could not help the words they were using, and that they were really only expressing in the stress of their emotion their strong political disapproval of me. And so with understanding, and humour, and never losing my temper, I managed to survive these ordeals.

To recall these times, it's worth placing on record how a particular meeting in my constituency appeared to a newspaper representative at the time, so I print here a story from *The Times* newspaper of 22nd October 1924, in which a meeting in the Baths at St. Pancras in the middle of my constituency was reported. Sir Douglas Hogg, Lord Hailsham as he now is, was the principal speaker, and what happened at the meeting will appear from the newspaper cutting.

ROWDY SCENES AT KENTISH TOWN

Sir D. Hogg's Interrupted Speech

Sir Douglas Hogg, K.C., addressed a mass meeting in support of the St. Pancras Conservative and Unionist candidates at the Public Hall, Kentish Town, last night. There were about 1500 persons present, but gangs of rowdies made speaking almost impossible.

Major R. W. Barnett, Conservative candidate for the South-West Division, presided. He said that Unionists went into the fight full of confidence and were determined to win all three seats in St. Pancras.

Sir Douglas Hogg, when appealing to the voters to rally in support of the Conservative candidates, met with repeated interruption.

" It is not only the Government which is afraid to face argument," he shouted. " Its supporters in the constituencies are copying the same tactics." (Cheers, followed by a renewal of booing and chanting of " Ding dong, ding dong ".) When he again essayed to speak, his remarks were drowned by shouts of " Sit down ! "

During a lull in the disturbance, Sir Douglas Hogg again attempted to speak, but it was only by shouting at the top of his voice that he could make himself heard by those immediately in front of him. He asked the electors of St. Pancras to run no risk of another Socialist Government. The issue in this election was whether the country was to have stable government. After another period of interruptions, Sir Douglas Hogg said he wondered whether the Socialist candidate for North St. Pancras would approve of that sort of behaviour by his supporters. If he did so, then he did not deserve to be a Member of Parliament, and if he did not it was a pity that his supporters could not respect his wishes. (Cheers and booing.)

Mr. Bloomfield, a local Socialist leader, after another uproar, mounted the platform and remarked that he came there on behalf of " our comrade Marley " (the Labour candidate for the Northern Division). These interruptions, he remarked, were doing " our comrade " a lot of harm, and he thought that speakers ought to have a fair hearing.

Captain Ian Fraser, the Conservative candidate for North St. Pancras, met with continuous disturbance, and, replying to his interrupters, said that the Conservative majority would be in proportion to the ill manners of his opponents in the hall that night. It was a disgraceful demonstration by the hooligans of North St. Pancras, and would be the subject of strong comment. The exhibition that night would do more than anything else to demonstrate to the constituents within the borough that the Conservative Party alone would serve them properly.

Mr. J. W. W. Hopkins, Conservative candidate for the South-East. Division, said that the disturbance was worth a lot of votes to him in his constituency. Mr. Hopkins was prevented from making himself heard by the booing in the galleries and at the back of the hall, and shouting and singing continued until he resumed his seat.

An attempt to sing the "Red Flag" was frustrated by the Unionists joining in the National Anthem.

I have said that I never lost my temper—I hope this was true—I tried very hard not to do so. Part of the game of baiting a candidate is to try and make him lose his temper. If you are in the audience and you can make the speaker lose his temper you are one up, because when he has lost his temper he may very likely say something that you can use against him at later meetings. In any event he's not very likely to comport himself with dignity and composure if he's in such a state. So, whatever they say and however aggravating and unfair they are, never lose your temper. Remember always that you are on a platform, which puts you a foot or two above the audience—that's an enormous physical advantage. Remember that the initiative is with you—*you* are the person who is speaking. They may shout, but unless they are extremely well organised, they will get tired before you do. And most important of all, talk to the back of the audience. You nearly always find that interrupters will press up to the front because they think that the noise they make will drown you the more effectively. Now this is not true if you keep your head—they may think they're drowning you because they hear their own voices and not yours, but they are shouting towards you and away from the audience, and if you go on speaking quietly and strongly towards the back of the audience, the bulk of the listeners will be hearing you and not them, and so after a time you will prevail.

I suppose all human beings like doing things that they can do. The man who can play tennis well likes playing tennis, the man who can play bridge well likes playing bridge, and so the man who can address a noisy audience, and hold them down by wit and humour and repartee, and by knowing the technique, enjoys doing it. I went through a stern school;

I held outdoor meetings at every street corner ; I never hesitated to whip my audience up into a frenzy if I thought that by calming them down later I would gain mastery. So particularly anxious was I to avoid any suggestion that they were treating me with special courtesy because of my blindness that I sometimes went out of my way to annoy them, and then by art and craft, calm them down afterwards. And as I became more adept at this, it gave me more and more pleasure, it was like mastering and riding a restless horse, or driving a fast car where judgement and hands counted.

Talking about hands, people who ride horses speak of " hands " and of " handling " a horse—it's one of those mysteries only understandable to people who ride horses—you either " have hands " or you " haven't got hands ". I happen to love horses and to understand them a little, and so I know what is meant by this phrase. I happen also to love machinery—I hate to hear machinery badly used, gears badly changed, and I maintain that there are people who have " hands " for machinery, just as there are people who have " hands " for horses. Perhaps another sporting analogy may be used—dealing with a political audience that is restless is a little like fishing—you throw a fly over the audience just like you throw a fly over a river to see what's there—you suspect that some interrupter to the left-hand rear of the meeting is, shall we say, Liberal, so you throw a fly gently over him by making some statement which you know will be anathema to Liberals, and you see if he bites. Then perhaps you suspect that in the front row towards the right is a group of young Communists, or people who think they're Communists, and in order to see if you're right you throw a fly over them and see if they bite, and so gradually you get your audience in your mind—how it is composed, what will be its reactions. Then you try and find some common denominator which will rally all those who are not cranks of one sort or another, and by that means you create some kind of unanimity in the audience, and get the majority on your side. This kind of public speaking is very hard work, it makes you sweat like some severe physical exercise ; it's a great mental excitement and enormous fun, and although in

normal times one looks forward to elections with apprehension because of the great effort which they cost one, there's no question about it that, being in it, one enjoys the rough-and-tumble and the mental exertion and the stimulus of pitting one's wits against the crowd.

But what I have been writing about is rather the technique of handling awkward situations. Normally the audience wants to know what's in your mind, and is not very attracted by cleverness or by trickery, and it's only when the meeting begins to get out of hand that the exercise of the devices and methods I have been describing become justifiable and necessary. I have always taken enormous pains about my speeches, the most immense trouble to get them exactly right, to get into my mind exactly what I want to say, and how I'm going to say it. I don't learn them by heart, and in election times I don't speak from any braille notes, but I do take enormous trouble to see that they're right. My experience is that you start an election with a speech, or perhaps two or three speeches, which between them are much too long. Gradually as your meetings become more frequent and your voice gets more tired, you cut and cut the speech until it consists of just a series of sharp sentences, one after the other, lasting say twelve or fifteen minutes. You tend, as the election proceeds, to choose those sentences which have evoked the largest amount of applause. You do this partly consciously and partly subconsciously, it's a kind of survival of the fittest sentences. By the time you get near to the end of your election campaign, you've got a speech lasting about twelve minutes, which is almost entirely made up of sentences calculated to evoke applause from the majority.

But when all is said and done it is not the speeches of the individual candidate or his personality, or the particular vote that he attracts, that really make and unmake Parliaments and Governments. It's the general mood in which the country happens to be at the time which dominates the issue, and it doesn't matter how clever the candidate, and how hard-working, he cannot stand up against a real tide that is running against him. I found this in 1929. Whereas

in 1924 I had won my constituency from Labour by a few hundred votes, turning over some thousands, in 1929, only four years later, I was swept away by four thousand votes in the same constituency in which my wife and I had sweated blood to please the people and do their work. You can call this ingratitude and be sad about it if you like, but far the best way is to take it as part of the political game. It is necessary for some people to sacrifice themselves in order that the civil servants, who really manage the country, may remain in their jobs and carry on with it, and we amiable politicians render a great service to the country by putting ourselves up to be knocked down from time to time. That is the democratic method, and it's preferable to a method under which the Government that's in power stays in until it is turned out by bloodshed.

There's an extraordinary tendency amongst Ministers I find, and civil servants, never to admit that they don't know some things. My experience in the House of Commons leads me to believe that they almost always lose caste by this attitude. They shift and turn and always try to avoid saying that they were wrong, or that they don't know. So impressed did I become in my earliest days in politics that this was a mistake that I adopted the other extreme, and if in a public election meeting I was caught out by a question which I couldn't answer, a tricky question, I just quietly said, " Do you know, I don't know the answer to that, but I'll find it out for you, and give it to you tomorrow at my meeting if you'll come up afterwards, or ask it publicly." This so astounded the audience that it evoked applause, and I found it was really rather a good trick, not to use too often but to use when it genuinely applied.

Of course you lay yourself open to the retort from the audience that you ought to know. But you mustn't let this floor you. Your answer is, " Well of course if I was Mr. So-and-so (that's the name of your political opponent) he would undoubtedly say that he did. He always knows everything, and indeed promises everything. That's one of the reasons why you ought not to vote for him."

I don't want the light way in which I have dealt with

some of the aspects of electioneering and making speeches to rowdy audiences to lead any of my readers to suppose that I treat the attitude of the electors towards the candidate lightly. On the contrary the whole essence of democracy is that there should be faith and confidence between electors and candidates or members, and the sincerity of one's appeal, the sincerity of one's desire to do one's duty is in my view the real matter that counts in election times. Given this, and that the general tide is running in your favour, you'll be all right. Without this sincerity of purpose it doesn't matter how clever you are, you'll never put it across a British electorate.

11

ELECTIONS

THERE is only one blind man out of every thousand of the population, and unhappily there are very few who have the opportunity to enter public life. Consequently when a blind man enters politics or takes part in public controversy, his activities become " news ". Somebody once said—it's an old story but it's worth repeating—" If you see a dog bite a man, that's ordinary, but if you see a man bite a dog, that's news." And it is very true that it is always the unusual that makes news. So the blind man is news if he does anything out of the ordinary, and the blind candidate is almost bound to be news. If he is entirely unknown this is an advantage to him, and he's entitled to look upon any newspaper cuttings mentioning his candidature as positively to his advantage. The reference to his name in the papers will make him known, will perhaps increase his audiences, and will give him the chance of putting his message and his personality across. If on the other hand he is well known, either in his constituency or generally, I do not think that publicity with regard to his blindness helps him very much.

Personally I disliked being called " the blind M.P.", but I realised that it was my misfortune and not the newspapers' fault that they described me so. They want to explain to their readers who the person about whom they are writing is, and they find a short and apt description. For example Sir Beachcroft Towse is frequently described as " the blind V.C.", and I seem to remember " the sporting Peer " or " the boxing Peer ". I must say I was very flattered when *The Times* newspaper ceased to call me " the blind M.P." but merely referred to me by name.

Many people whom I meet, and particularly officers in the Armed Forces, are extremely nervous about newspapers. They're terrified lest some paragraph should appear about them which will make them feel awkward when their friends

read it. They're really very pleased to be mentioned in the papers, but in order to try and show that they aren't, they say slighting things about the newspapers themselves. This is really very unfair. I do not take the view which is held by some people that the more popular newspapers are terribly inaccurate and sensational. I think they reflect public opinion very accurately, and they have access to the best thought and the best writing of the day. My party, the Conservative Party, has often been very angry with the popular newspapers in the last twenty-five years, generally because the newspapers have not agreed with the party policy. But more often than not the newspapers have been right. The newspapers have a thousand ears and a thousand eyes. It's their job to know what the people are thinking, and they are a pretty sure guide. If they write things up a little bit snappily and a little sentimentally, if they show the human side of their story a little strongly, that is because there is a great sentiment and a great humanity in our people. But on broad issues of policy, and on broad issues of patriotism and the well-being of the country, the newspapers have, by and large, rendered a great service.

My attitude towards the newspapers both personally and in relation to my office as Chairman of St. Dunstan's is to regard all of them as my best friends. If ever they ask for a story, I always give them one unless confidence or official secrecy forbids, partly because it helps to have the causes you are interested in mentioned in any newspaper, and partly also because if you do not give them a story they will probably get one for themselves, and what they get will be on the whole less accurate and less in line with your own view than if you give them one. Nor do I subscribe to the view that the average journalist cannot be trusted. In my experience he can be trusted implicitly, and if he knows that you are trusting him he will never let you down. You can tell him the innermost line on a particular matter, and distinguish between what you are telling him to give him the right background and what he may publish, and if you make yourself clear he will never let you down. If you get misquoted, or something goes wrong, it's probably your fault,

or perhaps a mere accident, a bit of bad luck. It's never in my experience a matter of bad faith.

If on the other hand you try to twist him and lead him up the garden then you'll get exactly what you deserve. So if my advice in this matter after some experience is of any use, let me say to any young man who is going into public life, or who meets the newspapers in the way of business, treat them as your friends and always give them a story.

During an election I would start early in the morning with my secretary reading my letters and the newspapers. I would read the leading articles in all the leading newspapers, so as to get an idea what was in the people's minds that day. This would help me with background for my speeches during the forthcoming programme of meetings. My post would probably contain a number of requests from individuals to promise them this or that, a number of letters from organisations asking me to pledge myself to this or that. I would never pledge myself in advance to do more than look into a matter earnestly and sincerely. I believe this is the only course that is open as a matter of duty and honour, and I am equally certain that it is the only course that is safe. This is one of those admirable occasions on which duty and expediency point the same way. Then I would see a newspaper reporter or write some news paragraphs. Then I would go off to the constituency and meet my agent and the chairman and discuss any particular matter that perhaps had arisen during the previous day, and we would lay our plans and discuss our tactics for the day and the evening that was to follow.

Then would follow probably meetings at various industrial works during the morning; two or three meetings during the lunch hour; a swift return home, or visit to a restaurant for lunch, and then a series of afternoon meetings, starting probably at half-past two or three o'clock and going on to five or six. Then a return home for tea and a bath, and possibly half an hour's rest.

In the early days of my electioneering it was customary for the candidate to lose his voice as the campaign proceeded. So much speaking without any rest would ruin any voice,

and a laryngitis set in which left one with hardly a whisper. But I discovered a cure for this which gave me enormous pleasure. The eminent nose, throat, and ear surgeon, Mr. Walter Howarth, had taken a most active part in the work of St. Dunstan's, having been our consultant in these surgical subjects and having had through his hands the largest number of cases of frontal sinus damage and of similar affections due to eye wounds of any other surgeon in the country. He was a great friend of mine, and I learned from him that one of his more agreeable pursuits was to provide actors and actresses with voices when they had to fulfil a contract and had really lost their voice. He would dope their vocal chords with astringents, and then squirt on to the tightened-up chords some kind of varnish which would prevent the saliva from washing the astringent off. This process would provide a voice for an hour or two. It was rather like tightening up a violin string.

I went to him and it worked like magic. I would go in without any voice at all, and come out with quite a strong voice, and while the dope lasted I could match any of my opponents. Then after an hour or two it would collapse again, and the next morning I would be as husky as ever. I'm not going to say that this process was one which could go on for ever, but then an election didn't go on for ever, and during the last four or five days it did provide a remedy.

Science, however, provided a better remedy as time went on, for loud-speakers were introduced. My strong interest in wireless had led to my making friends with Captain Round. He was an experimental and scientific man on the staff of the Marconi Company. He was responsible for many fundamental inventions, including the first receivers which enabled direction-finding to be done, and in this connection it is recorded of him that he plotted exactly the position of the German fleet during the battle of Jutland, and if his wireless advice to the Admiralty had been taken, the issue of that battle might have been different. He had been responsible also for some of the more important inventions which were associated with broadcasting.

I knew him well and used frequently to go round to his

room in Marconi House and talk to him about inventions. He had recently brought out a powerful loud-speaker, something greater and stronger than anything that had ever been produced before. He was very anxious to try it in electioneering, and I was only too anxious to give him the opportunity. So some months before the 1924 election we had a big public meeting, and installed his loud-speakers. They were a novelty at the time and caused a considerable sensation. As the interruptions increased, so did the power of the loud-speakers, and we held our own. I learnt later from experience that it doesn't really pay to shout your opponents down by mere power. You've got to handle them with cunning and wit and argument and repartee, otherwise you don't get away with it. Indeed you create a situation in which you are regarded as rather a bully, with a big mechanical voice not giving the little interrupter a chance. So while the loud-speaker is commonly used and is a very great advantage and saves the voice, it must not be over-used, nor is it a substitute for all the better qualities of the public speaker. I would go so far as to say that where you can do without a loud-speaker, you'd better do so, because no loud-speaker improves your voice ; all it does is to strengthen it, and in doing so it takes away some part of your personality and of the intimate contact which you ought to make with your audience. But in electioneering it is necessary, and as an alternative to ruining your voice and becoming entirely husky, I recommend it for careful use.

Eventually you reach the actual day of the poll. This is a most anxious day. You start early in the morning going round the polling stations. You ask a policeman outside, and the official inside, how things are going, and they give you guarded replies. " You'll be all right, Captain," they say, but you don't know whether they mean it or not. Sometimes if you stand at the door of the polling booth and the people pass in, they will avert their eyes and not look at you, and you don't know whether this means that they are not supporting you, or whether it means simply that they don't want their friends to know that they *are* supporting you, and so you are left in the dark to the last minute.

Your political agent has a representative outside each polling booth, so have the agents of the other parties, and as a voter comes out he is asked to hand in his poll card to the representative of the agent of his party. Some electors refuse to do this, but most of them comply, and it is presumed that they have handed the card to the representative of the side for which they are voting. By this means it is considered possible to estimate before the actual count is made what is going to be the result of the election, and most political agents pride themselves on estimating from the canvass returns and from these poll card returns as they are called, and from other indications, what the result is going to be.

The experienced election agent will sometimes, very often in fact, guess the result very accurately, but neither you nor your particular supporters can rest satisfied with this, and satisfaction can only come after the count and the announcement by the returning officer.

In North St. Pancras the count took place in the Town Hall. Three constituencies, North St. Pancras, South-West St. Pancras, and South-East St. Pancras—all the elections of these three divisions would be counted together. The Town Clerk was the returning officer, and a considerable number of his staff, perhaps forty or fifty, would be employed for the counting. The ballot boxes would have been collected and brought into the Town Hall. They would be emptied out, and would be handed to clerks who would sit at tables behind a railing counting them into fifties or hundreds—Fraser, Marley, Roome, Fraser, Fraser, Marley, Marley, Marley, Roome, Roome—so the piles would grow.

A small number of your own most ardent workers would be given tickets by you to come to the count—this was esteemed a great privilege. They would go round looking over the railings watching the counters to see that no mistake was made or partiality shown. There is no risk of partiality being shown—this kind of thing doesn't happen in English elections, and there's hardly any risk of a mistake ; though it is possible that if an election is so near as to be a matter of doubt, say, within two or three votes, a recount may find

that a mistake has been made in the counting of ten or twenty thousand votes. But normally the margin is not so narrow as this, and a few votes this way or the other, or even a packet of fifty or a hundred that may be put into the wrong pile, would not affect the issue.

I and my wife and the two other candidates for the other two divisions and our opponents roamed about the Town Hall disconsolate, anxious. Stout-hearted friends would come up and say, "I don't want to worry you, Captain, but it's not looking too good". Others would come up and say, "You're going to be all right, Captain, you're going to be all right". You would communicate your nervousness to them and they theirs to you, and as the weary business went on for two or three hours, an almost unbearable anxiety would grow in the counting hall.

Then there would be a stir, the votes had been separated, the piles were being counted, and the agents were going into the next room with the returning officer to deal with the spoiled votes. Some hundreds of votes are spoiled in most elections, but they only make a difference when the result is really close. Nevertheless the ceremony of dealing with the spoiled votes calls your attention to the fact that you are getting near to the end of the count, and so it is significant. Then comes a whisper with all the air of credibility: "The Tories are in in the North". "The Tories have lost in the North." "The Tories have won in the South", and so on. You don't know whether it is true or whether it isn't. Finally your agent comes up to you, catches hold of your arm and says, "I think you're going to be all right, sir". Even then you do not dare to hope. You do not dare to hope until the Town Clerk, the returning officer, goes up on to the platform, silence is called, and he announces the result:

"FRASER, William Jocelyn Ian (Conservative)	13,964
MARLEY, James (Labour) . . .	13,171
ROOME, H. D. (Liberal)	2,748

I declare Captain William Jocelyn Ian Fraser elected."

Then at last you breathe a sigh of relief, you probably kiss your wife, partly out of love and affection and partly

out of anxiety and relief. There are brief formal votes of thanks to the officials and you prepare to go home.

But as you go out of the Town Hall you meet a crowd. Mostly hostile, for your own supporters have long past gone to bed, and they boo and cat-call at you and a few of your own stalwarts give you a cheer. And if the crowd are particularly angry they bang on your car, and the police protect you and get you away. This happened to us once at St. Pancras. The crowd pressed in so strongly, many thousands of them, upon our cars that we had to have not only police but mounted police protection, but even then the crowd broke through and banged on the windows of our car.

It is curious how worked-up people get about elections, but it's only a few zealous partisans ; the great bulk of the people take these things calmly and philosophically, and settle down to welcome and give a good chance to the new Government whatever party it may belong to.

So in 1924 I went to Parliament as Member for the St. Pancras (North) Division. I was twenty-seven years of age. I was very grateful and very proud.

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M.P.

So I entered Parliament and a new and very interesting life opened up before me. It was not entirely strange, for I had been a member of the London County Council for three years, and the London County Council is a kind of Parliament in miniature. In most County Councils and Borough Councils and City Corporations politics are avoided by general consent, but in the London County Council and in certain of the very large cities the business is conducted on a political basis. The party with a majority sits on one side of the Chamber and the minority on the other, forming an Opposition. In the day-to-day work of committees, in administration, party politics are largely forgotten, but when general issues arise in open council there are often political debates on lines which are familiar in the constituencies and in Parliament.

So when I went to Westminster I had some idea of the rules and order of debate, of political issues, and of the kind of persons I would meet. Nevertheless I entered a new world, for there is something about the atmosphere of the House of Commons which is not reproduced anywhere else. It is the kindest, shrewdest, most critical, and, when necessary, the most severe group of men you can imagine. Extremely tolerant and kindly when mistakes are made, or when people are nervous, but hard and severe should you take advantage of it. I have come to regard the good sense and the wisdom of the House as of an extremely high order, and to reverence and love it. Hardly anyone can reach the House of Commons unless there is something interesting and unusual about him. He may not be very brilliant, he may not be very scientific or logical, but there is something about him that appeals to you. Every interest in the world is represented there, and there is not a subject under the sun which you cannot discuss with some Member or another who is more

or less an expert, or at any rate has considerable knowledge of it.

But it is not so much the individuals, interesting and pleasant as they are, which make the House of Commons an interesting and pleasant place. It's the spirit of the House itself. And this you can only appreciate by sitting there for a considerable time and letting it soak into you. I have seen ardent and revolutionary men come into the House of Commons determined to pull it down, metaphorically speaking, to criticise and scoff at its traditions and its customs, and I have seen them five or ten years later rise to a point of order and defend the method and manners of the House against attack from any quarter. Nor is it true to say that the House of Commons is slow to act or to adjust itself to modern conditions. I have seen it take days and nights over some small measure about which there was political controversy in peace-time, and I have seen it pass in a few hours in this war legislation which challenged the dearest privileges and rights of all classes.

I went with my wife into the great buildings at Westminster a little diffidently ; kindly policemen directed us. How wonderful all policemen are in their various duties all over the country, but how particularly agreeable are the House of Commons policemen. There must be something about the atmosphere of the place which makes them so. And we found ourselves in the Inner Lobby reserved for Members. From this big hall, the House itself opens out and all round it are offices—the Government Whips' office, the Opposition Whips' office, the Post Office, and so on.

A messenger took us to see one of the Whips. He had been expecting us, and was most anxious to give us all possible advice and help. Would I go and see the Speaker's Secretary ? We went round to see him, and he told us that Mr. Speaker, that was Mr. Speaker Whitley, had made certain arrangements for my convenience. He had anticipated some of my little difficulties and without my asking had given thought to them. My wife and my secretary would be given passes which would enable them to go anywhere in the House where Members were allowed to go, so

that one of them might be my guide. She could not enter the Chamber itself or the Smoke Room or the Reading Room, but everywhere else in the House she might go, with me or alone to meet me.

Mr. Speaker had arranged that one of the corner seats on the front bench would be reserved for me. This is not the Front Bench upon which the Ministers sit, but is right at the other end of the House, where ordinary Members take their places. Theoretically there is no precedence about seats in the House of Commons, all are free to all, and any Member may sit where he likes, but custom provides that the Members of the Government sit on the Front Bench on Mr. Speaker's right hand, and the leaders of the Opposition on the Front Bench on Mr. Speaker's left hand. And there are one or two special seats which are reserved by long custom for very senior Members of the House, and for ex-Ministers. But ordinary private Members have to establish their right to their seat by going down to the House very early in the morning and placing a card on the seat they choose. If they carry out this custom for a considerable number of days, they will establish a kind of courtesy right to their seats.

The Speaker had suggested the reservation of the corner seat nearest to the entrance to the Chamber for me, and I have had it all the years I have been in the House. Later the Speaker gave me the use of a little room, where I can have my secretary down, and read my parliamentary papers, and do my letters and carry on with my work at the House when necessary. Apart from a thousand and one little kindnesses from Members themselves and from the servants of the House as a whole, all of which have been of the greatest importance to me, these are the only special privileges which I have been granted. I am most grateful to Mr. Speaker Whitley, and to Mr. Speaker Fitzroy who renewed these concessions when I re-entered the House, on his own initiative and without my asking, and I am grateful to the House in whose name Mr. Speaker acts for this spontaneous understanding and kindness.

I was introduced to various Members who showed me the way to the Smoke Room, and to other parts of the

building, and soon I began to feel at home. My wife and I would go down to the House, particularly perhaps late at night when there were few Members about, and with her help I would walk from my room up to the Chamber, or from my room to Committee Rooms, or to the Dining Rooms, or to the Smoke Room. At first I would walk with her, getting the sense of the direction, the distance between the turnings, and so on. I would not actually count the steps from one corner to another but would get an idea of the various noises which occurred on the way. For example, walking down one of the longer corridors one passes a tape machine on the left and an opening on the right and a little further on the door of the Smoke Room whence comes a buzz of conversation, and then at the end of the corridor a distant murmur of conversation and movement from the great big public hall on one's right.

These various noises and the feeling of the place gave one a sense of one's way about, and after going over the various journeys with my wife, and then ahead of her, I would eventually make the journeys by myself. I remember on a number of occasions during all-night sittings, when the place was practically deserted, the Members present being either in the Chamber or in the Smoke Room or in the Dining Room, I would wander all about that vast building feeling my way and learning it. At the door of the Chamber itself is the doorkeeper and a number of messengers. They frequently act as my guides, and it saves me time and trouble and to some extent saves other people trouble that I should make use of the willingly offered services. But if necessary I can go alone, and that is the great point, and I frequently do. Or at least I frequently did in the old Chamber. Now that the old Chamber has been bombed and burned out, and we have moved to other quarters, it is not so easy, for the place is strange and is not laid out so symmetrically or so agreeably as was the case before.

I've often heard people say that they could not work happily in a system which required obedience to the Whips. This idea of obedience to the Whips is born of a misunderstanding. Ninety-nine out of a hundred Members take the

advice of their Whips on ninety-nine issues out of a hundred, not because they have no minds of their own or no views of their own, but because they willingly agree to work together in a team or party, because it is the only way in which the Parliamentary system will work. The majority party, which forms the Government, or the minority party, which forms the Opposition, has its general principles or policy, and broadly speaking the issues that come to be decided in Parliament are decided in regard to these broad general policies.

Frequently you will see Members rush into the Division Lobby from an appointment outside, or from a Committee which they have been attending, and as they enter the Whips will say to them, "Government Ayes", and you will follow the crowd into the Aye Lobby, and as you go will ask a fellow Member, "What's this vote on?" At first sight it may appear that you are voting without knowledge at the mere behest of the Whips. This is true and yet it is not true. You know what Bill or motion is being discussed by the House, but since you have been outside the House on some other business you do not know exactly what stage they have reached, or what particular detail they are voting on, nor can you know whether the Government is voting "aye" or "no" unless you are told. So the direction you are being given is not an order to vote in a particular way against your conscience, but simply assistance to carry out the duty you would have wished to carry out anyway, and which is almost always in line with the broad general policy to which you have already given your adherence.

Thus in practice the Whips do not provide any strain upon the conscience, and following their advice does not present any difficulties. Occasionally great issues arise, but when this happens Members are well informed, and make up their minds how they are going to act. Sometimes you do find yourself in disagreement with the Government as a whole or with the Minister who is making a particular proposal. You may express yourself strongly in disagreement in the House, and you may even vote against the Government, but you'll probably support the Government. Is this inconsistent? I think the answer is clearly no, when the

circumstances are understood. If every individual Member pleased himself about every issue that came before the House, the government of the country could not be carried on, and when you vote against the Government on a major matter you are in effect saying, " I consider this Government ought to be turned out ". Now your real view may be that you disagree with the particular measure but that the present Government should most certainly stay in, because you think it is a good Government and is doing the best it can for the country.

There's nothing new or strange about this apparent conflict ; it occurs to every individual who serves on a committee. If there are five of you on a committee or a board of directors, and four of you take a particular view about a particular matter, and the fifth takes the opposite view, he will express his opposition ; if necessary, he will record a vote. But ninety-nine times out of a hundred he does not record a vote, because in effect he remains a supporter of the chairman and the rest of the committee.

On the face of it, " catching the Speaker's eye " would seem to be impossible for a blind man. But in practice it is not. As each Member finishes speaking other Members who wish to speak rise in their places and remain standing until Mr. Speaker calls one of their names. There is no difficulty about this for me, except that it is sometimes impossible to judge the exact moment when the preceding speaker sits down. He may make what seems to be a peroration and apparently end his speech so far as I can hear, and then pause and then turn to another subject and go on for another five minutes. Other Members will not be deceived because they will see that he is still standing. In a case like this I sometimes ask the Member sitting next to me to give me the tip when the Member who is addressing the House really sits down. When a set Debate is taking place of which notice has been given, it is the custom for a Member to give his name in to Mr. Speaker as one desiring to be called to speak on this subject. Mr. Speaker can never promise that he will call a particular Member for he does not know what may happen during the progress of a Debate,

but he is able sometimes to give an indication that he has you in mind, and experience of the House and an assessment of the way in which a Debate is going will enable you to judge fairly accurately what are your chances of being called, and when you are likely to be called.

My maiden speech was made about ex-Service men. I am glad that this should have been so, because in one sense it characterised my position in the House of Commons. Although naturally it has always been my first duty to represent my constituents with all their varied interests, I have always felt that I had another duty not inconsistent with my responsibilities to my constituency, namely, to help look after the interests of ex-Service men. After the last war there had been absorbed into the Civil Service a considerable number of men who had passed through the war. They were engaged as temporary civil servants. They were handicapped in entering for the regular permanent Civil Service because it was difficult for them to pass the standard examinations, the competitors for which are normally boys and girls round about eighteen or nineteen years of age. The ex-Service men were on the average four or five years older than this, and had been away from school at the war for a sufficient time to have lost their facility for passing examinations. On the other hand they had a wider experience of life to offer.

So there was a controversy between the Civil Service on the one hand, which naturally wanted to maintain its peace-time academic standards, and the ex-Service civil servants on the other, who wanted permanent status and argued that it was not fair to ask them to compete with boys and girls straight out of school. The two points of view are well illustrated by the following story: The Civil Service Commissioners, thinking they were examining boys and girls from school, asked a candidate, "How far away is the moon?" The candidate, a young man of twenty-two who had four years' war service, replied, "The information is in Whitaker; it is too far away to interfere with me as a civil servant." I took the side of the ex-Service men, and we obtained very considerable concessions from the Government.

I was very nervous about this maiden speech and my effort was a very moderate one, but it is the custom in the House of Commons always to praise a maiden speech and I was flattered and delighted to hear the next Member who got up after me and one or two others later in the Debate referring to the "most excellent speech which has been made by the hon. and gallant Member for North St. Pancras". Later in my Parliamentary life I found myself speaking next after a maiden speech, and I made exactly the same references following the Parliamentary courtesy.

There were a number of benefits for the blind which it fell to my lot to secure in Parliament. In two cases an Act of Parliament was required, so I had the experience of drafting and carrying through the House two little Acts of Parliament, and a very interesting experience it was. The drafting of a Bill is a highly technical matter, and I sought the help of the Clerks of the House and of others, which was very willingly given. You must then get support in all parties for your proposal, and in particular you must get the Minister concerned in the Government to give the measure his blessing so that it can go forward with Government support.

The first was an Act of Parliament called the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Act 1926. This was a simple measure to allow every blind person to have a wireless set without a licence. It seemed to me a kindly gesture on the part of Parliament to pass this, though there was the very good justification that the wireless set means so much more to the blind person and that he can enjoy so much less many of the other things that he pays taxes for. Some of us set up subsequently under the Chairmanship of Captain Sir Beachcroft Towse, V.C., a fund called the British Wireless for the Blind Fund, which makes an appeal each Christmas, so that it may now be said that it is the custom of this country to provide a wireless licence free and a wireless set free to every blind person who needs one.

The other Act related to voting, and was called the Blind Voters Act 1934. Under the law before this Act was passed, a blind person had to go to a polling station and declare to

the presiding officer, in the presence of the representatives of the candidates, who he wanted to vote for. His ballot paper was then marked by the presiding officer and placed in the ballot-box. This had certain definite disadvantages, and was a source of great uneasiness to many blind people. They felt that their friends and neighbours knew how they were voting, and that the secrecy of the ballot enjoyed by all others was denied to them. The Blind Voters Act provided that the blind person might take his wife or husband or a near relation or friend to mark the ballot paper for him. There were of course certain safeguards which I need not trouble to go into. This little measure gave very widespread pleasure.

Early in my Parliamentary career I asked a question about broadcasting, namely, whether the proceedings of this House could be broadcast. This caused quite a stir in the newspapers and in the House itself, and there was much discussion upon the matter. I pressed the matter a number of times. The House was opposed to the innovation and I confess that, as a young new Member keen on broadcasting, I felt out of sympathy with this reluctance. I thought it was due to needless traditionalism. Now, after nearly twenty years in public life, I have changed my view and would myself oppose the broadcasting of the proceedings of Parliament. The fundamental objection to the broadcasting of Parliament which cannot, I think, be overcome, is that speaking in Debate to the particular audience around you is a different art to speaking to a microphone for the mass of the electors. If the microphone entered the House of Commons the intimacy and personal nature of our Debates would be adversely affected, and speeches now addressed to the House would tend to become orations addressed to the nation.

I also asked many other questions about broadcasting, because the subject interested me. But more of this later.

I made many speeches on general subjects, but, as is the case with most Members, specialised in the particular matters upon which I had special knowledge. In the wider field I studied Empire matters, because of my natural interest arising out of the childhood years I had spent in South Africa, and

Royal Air Force matters, and in the more limited field I continued to do what I could to help ex-Service men and blind people in a variety of ways. My interest in the R.A.F. is, I think, worth while devoting a few paragraphs to, because it records a little bit of unwritten history.

Air-Commodore G. Bentley Dacre, C.B.E., D.S.O., is my brother-in-law. He was one of the earliest flyers, having Pilot Aviator's certificate No. 162. He belonged to the Royal Naval Air Service before the last war, and was sent out to the Dardanelles, where he was, with another pilot, the first to drop torpedoes from airplanes. These two young men succeeded in sinking a Turkish warship and a Turkish transport. The Admiral out there patted them on the back. They were recommended for and were awarded D.S.O.s for very gallant exploits, and very little more was done about it. It was hard for Naval men, particularly senior ones, to recognise the importance of this new weapon. It was unnatural that torpedoes should be dropped from the air.

The Senior Officer to whom these two young men were responsible was a certain Captain Murray Sueter, now Rear-Admiral Sir Murray Sueter, C.B., M.P. I happened to meet him in the Smoke Room and, talking about one thing and another, we came to some topic of conversation that linked him up with George Dacre. My friendship with Sir Murray led to my learning of the Air Committee which he was just starting, and I became a member of it. Though Members of Parliament may not have realised it at the time, and may not even realise it now, I believe that this little Air Committee had a profound influence upon the development of the R.A.F. and consequently upon our readiness in the air when we entered this war.

If you had listened to Debates about the Army, Navy, and Air Force as I did in 1924 and 1925, you would have observed a strange thing. The custom in the House is for each important Minister to come down to the House and bring his estimates. He will make a speech covering the whole ground of his department, and ask Parliament to vote so many millions of pounds for the Crown to spend upon the services of his department during the forthcoming

year. It is customary for each of the Services to have a day's Debate, and in those years 1924 and 1925 the Army and Navy Debates would be very well attended. There would be a fairly full house, and quite a number of Members to speak as well as a waiting list of Members who were too numerous to be called.

But when the day for the Air Force estimate came, the Minister would make his speech, some particular person in the Opposition nominated to deal with the subject would make a reply, and possibly one or two others would make brief contributions. Then the whole Debate would fizzle out at perhaps six or seven o'clock in the evening, and a very thin and uninterested House would pack up and go home, or turn to other business.

Now why was there so much interest in the Army and Navy, and practically none in the Air Force? Maybe it was that the Army and Navy being old Services had a large following in the country, and particularly in the House of Commons. It has been the tradition in Britain for one or more sons belonging to better-off families to enter the Army or the Navy. There are many families in which there has been an officer in one or other of the Services for many generations. Some of these officers enter the House of Commons in middle age when they retire from the Service; others have fathers or brothers or cousins or brothers-in-law or other connections in the House of Commons. I think you would probably find in ordinary peace-time some two or three hundred Members of the House of Commons who have a direct or indirect connection with the Army or the Navy. The consequence of this is a very vital interest in and knowledge of these older Services.

But the Air Force was comparatively new; it had only been brought into existence a few years before. There were no retired officers in middle age from whom a representative group could be found in the House of Commons, and there were not the same direct and indirect connections. Rear-Admiral Sir Murray Sueter believed in the extreme vulnerability of surface craft to bombs and torpedoes dropped from the air. He believed in the importance of a strong

and independent Air Force, and he gathered around him a committee of young men who felt that he was right, and who were willing to help him to voice these opinions. We arranged that week after week we would ask questions about the Royal Air Force, and that when the Royal Air Force estimates came up for debate we would see to it that there was a good House and plenty of speakers. We did our best to be well-informed about the matter by talking things over amongst ourselves, and by getting experts to come and address our committee. We were not ourselves experts, and if I were to look at the speeches we made now in retrospect, I should probably find that they were full of mistakes. But we did at least render the service of interesting the House in the Air, and making the ordinary Member of the House of Commons aware that this new Royal Air Force existed.

They didn't much like it, those who were so closely associated with the Army and the Navy, but they became aware of its existence, and so did the newspapers, and particularly the *Daily Mail*, which had always taken the keenest interest in Air matters. It is common knowledge now that we were not as well prepared in the Air as we should have been, or for that matter in any other Service, for the outbreak of this war. It is common knowledge that very few listened to Mr. Churchill, who proved to be so right. But at least I think I may claim that our small committee did something useful, and that without its labours it would have been some years before Parliament and the country had taken as much interest in Air matters as in fact they did.

Apart from my work as Member of Parliament and Chairman of St. Dunstan's—and these are my two principal preoccupations—I am a director of a number of public and private companies. I mention this not because it is in itself a matter of great importance, but because it illustrates yet another activity a blind man can undertake.

Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of directors : those who have served their whole working lifetime in the business and become directors when they are senior enough, and remain directors after they have retired from their managerial posts ; those who are big shareholders or have been brought

up in the business in which they have a family interest; and lastly those who come from outside the business and may be called "professional directors". I belong to the latter class, and I suppose my occupation would be described as director of companies. The "professional" or outside director is of use to a company because he brings to it some experience of the outside world or some contacts which it would not otherwise get.

Membership of the House of Commons sometimes leads to directorships. This is, I think, advantageous both to Parliament and to the companies concerned. Some people think that Members of Parliament should be whole-time Members of Parliament doing nothing else but attend at Westminster and in their constituencies. I do not think this is necessary—indeed I do not think it is desirable. Parliament should, I think, be a cross-section of the community and should be composed of men who have the gift of expression, but who have as many commercial, industrial, philanthropic, professional, and other contacts and interests as possible.

Many Members of Parliament are also members of Local Government Authorities, directors of public and private companies, and professional men, such as lawyers, doctors, solicitors, surveyors, and so on. This is in my opinion very definitely advantageous to Parliament, for it means that the men gathered together at Westminster are representatives of various aspects of the life of the community as a whole. If we were to go to Westminster as whole-time officials and renounce our outside contacts, we should very soon become civil servants, and would cease to represent the many and varied aspects of the country's life.

The holding of a directorship fits in extremely well with Membership of the House of Commons. It is possible to undertake both duties without the one interfering with the other because they are complementary and not competitive. Should a Member of Parliament take part in a discussion in the House of Commons or in a Committee, or should he approach a Minister regarding a matter in which a company of which he is a director is concerned, it is his duty and it is

the common custom for him to declare his interest. This, far from causing Members of the House to view what he says with suspicion, causes them to view it with added interest, because they realise he knows what he is talking about. Only if he does not declare his interest does he become suspect. It is indeed a very great advantage to the House that men with knowledge of various professions and commercial matters and industries and labour conditions are in it, and often a Member who speaks with particular authority about a particular trade or industry or about a particular trade union is able to make the most useful contribution to the Debate.

My office as Chairman of St. Dunstan's is very similar indeed to the chairmanship of a public company ; indeed in law St. Dunstan's is a public company, though of a special kind, which because of its philanthropic objects does not make profits and does not pay directors' fees to its chairman or the members of its Council.

As I have frequently said in earlier chapters, blindness is a considerable handicap, but it is no handicap to the carrying out of the work of a chairman of a board of directors or the work of a director. I probably have to do more work than other members of the boards which I sit on, in the sense that I have to read my agenda papers and minutes and reports, and this takes me longer than it takes them, but, having read them, my memory, which has been trained to this particular job, carries to the board meeting all the necessary information and I do not find myself at a loss.

A person who is a member of a number of boards may be of particular use to each of them. He will not, of course, accept office on boards whose interests are incompatible, but in every company there are a number of matters that are of common interest, such as company law, company procedure, the attitude of shareholders, the drawing up of a balance-sheet, the employment and remuneration of staff and workpeople, buying and selling and advertising, and public relations. In all these matters a wide experience of a number of different companies whose field of activity is in

a different sphere, perhaps even a different part of the world, is of considerable use.

At meetings themselves I find myself at no particular disadvantage ; without asking for any concessions or help, I naturally find that the chairman or any member of a board who raises an entirely new matter which may be in black and white will explain it for my benefit, but generally speaking I contrive by arrangement with the chairman or secretary to get all papers in advance so that I am fully posted as to business in hand before I go to the meeting. However agreeable your companions may be, it is not wise for a blind man to put them to any inconvenience if he can possibly help it, and there is no need to.

The holding of a number of directorships with the life of a Member of Parliament is a very agreeable existence. The meeting with fellow directors affords a number of interests and friendships which all help to make a full life.

A chairmanship, such as one that I hold in the commercial world and my chairmanship of St. Dunstan's in particular, is much more of an executive job. This involves office work. There is no reason why a blind man should not undertake office work, and successfully. One of the problems of the employment of the blind is to get a start, for in junior jobs eyesight and personal supervision or activity are required, whereas in senior jobs, the acquisition of information, the assessment of a position, thinking and decision are required.

I have sometimes said by way of illustration, and it happens to be exactly true, that it would be very difficult for a blind man to be a postman, but that it would be possible for a blind man to be a Postmaster-General, and indeed a blind man was. The higher you get up in administration and in executive work, the more other people see for you. The managing director, for example, of a railway does not in fact see the railway ; he could not do so because it is thousands of miles in length, and is concerned with docks and harbours, and hotels, and all sorts of goods, commodities, and activities, which it would be quite impossible for any one man to see at one time or even in many years. What he in fact does is to acquire information through an office and a system, and,

having regard to the information and the persons concerned, to make decisions.

Blindness does not inhibit the acquiring of information ; the eye is not the only gateway to the mind, and provided the method is adapted and trouble is taken and the mind is quick, there is no reason why information should not be acquired by a blind man as accurately and in the end as quickly as by a seeing person. It follows then that if a man has the power of administration and of executive decision, he can undertake jobs varying in importance from quite humble ones to quite big ones, even though he has not got his eyesight. Of course the field is a little limited, for there may be jobs in which judgement in matters of visual taste is required, but there is a considerable field in commerce and industry and in philanthropy where blind men may occupy positions as chairmen or directors or members of councils or committees, and a considerable number of my friends have successfully undertaken posts of this kind.

In dealing with letters in my office I must necessarily have a secretary to read them to me, but an ordinary sighted executive would have a secretary to write down the answers in shorthand, and there is therefore no very special difference between his position and mine. My secretary, after long practice in working with me, is able to read letters to me at a very great rate, and I am able to dictate answers swiftly and decisively. Whether I deal with more letters in an hour than a sighted person depends not so much upon the method used, or the absence of eyesight, as upon my quickness of mind in deciding what to say, and putting it into words. In fact with my various activities I manage to keep three secretaries going, which means a fair output of decision and activity.

At home in the evenings, particularly during this war when the office has to close early owing to blackout and travelling difficulties, I use a dictaphone, and this affords an additional means of getting work done. I take home with me notes as to a number of memoranda or letters or articles which I want to write, and at my leisure I dictate them to the instrument and they are typed the next day.

In interviews there is no very great handicap caused by blindness. Of course it is a difficulty not to see the person you are speaking to, but you quickly learn to judge by the voice and manner and handshake and way of speaking what manner of man or woman is in your office with you. And if you're wise you take pains beforehand to get your secretary to read to you very swiftly while they are being shown into the office some few particulars of them which have been obtained from *Who's Who* or from the letter they have written or from some enquiry she has made. Thus you are well equipped to meet them and know about them before they come into the office. We are all human and frail, and most of us vain, and we like to think that the person we are interviewing already knows something about us.

At conferences it may be necessary for me to have notes, and if they are voluminous and copious I may have a secretary sitting behind me to look up references for me. But in the ordinary way I work from a brief summary made in braille which I have prepared myself before the meeting takes place. Having read all the papers, a word or two on each subject will remind me of the matter, and if it is necessary for a proposal of mine to be amplified by papers, I bring them with me and circulate them to my fellow directors.

It amounts to this, that a blind man can undertake a chairmanship or a directorship without any very great difficulty, provided that he has the aptitude for quick decision and takes a little thought in advance of each meeting as to any particular difficulties that may arise in his case. The difficulties of blindness seem to other people to be so great that I confess that I felt very complimented when Sir Arthur Pearson first asked me to join the committees of St. Dunstan's and the National Institute for the Blind, and when some years later commercial friends asked me to join the board of a company. I think the greatest difficulty for a blind man is always to get into the job rather than to do it, and I commend to any who read these lines the thought that should there be a blind man of their acquaintance whose talents can be usefully employed on a hospital committee, in a local authority, or on the board of a company, they should not hesitate to use him

merely on account of his blindness. On the other hand they should not use him because of his blindness ; that would be fatal to them and to him and to the cause of the efficient blind man in general.

I worked very hard from 1924 to 1929 in the House of Commons and in my constituency. My wife helped me in every possible way. She became a member of a number of School Managers and other committees. She was known throughout the length and breadth of the constituency, and I addressed street-corner meetings regularly and obtained a very considerable personal following. Nevertheless in 1929 I was swept away by the tide and lost the seat to Labour. It was a Radical and Labour seat by tradition, and it was considered something of an exceptional victory that I had been elected for this Division in 1924. It was no surprise, therefore, when the seat reverted to its earlier political allegiance.

At first I was very disappointed and a little hurt. I said to myself, " Blow, blow, thou winter wind, thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude ". But I soon got over this feeling, and said to myself, " Never mind, you must start again ". I was re-elected for St. Pancras in 1931, and in 1935, and by this time I had learned a good deal about electorates, and had become, I believe, sufficiently tough to stand all the buffets of fortune which are part of the life of any politician.

Having become accustomed to long hours in the evenings in the House of Commons, I found myself at first without enough to do. I had, I think, half anticipated that I would lose the seat, and a year before I had begun to eat dinners at the Inner Temple. You have to eat dinners for three years in order to be called to the Bar. " Eating dinners " is more than a matter of keeping body and soul together. It involves becoming a member of one of the Inns of Court, meeting fellow students, becoming part of the corporate life of the barrister's profession. I had been eating dinners for a year when I found myself out of Parliament, so I then settled down to study Law seriously, and in the following eighteen months or two years I passed the examinations and was called to the Bar. I was then thirty-four years of age,

and it is not easy to go back to school and start learning for examinations at that age.

I read constitutional law first, and passed that examination without much difficulty. A great deal of that subject had subconsciously entered my mind in connection with my interest in public affairs and in Parliamentary procedure. It was not difficult to answer questions about Parliamentary government or to learn the differences between our system and the Dominions and American systems. And by reading a few books on constitutional history I was enabled to fill in the gaps. I then went through the other subjects, including Roman law, which I found most difficult of all. It was not until afterwards that I realised how good the advice my elders and betters had given me was that I should have read Roman law first. My advisers had said to me, " If you spend the whole of the first year reading Roman law, it will pay you in the end ". I did not believe them, I do not think students ever believe their advisers, but I know now that what they said was true.

I had ceased my ordinary education at seventeen when I had gone to Sandhurst at the outbreak of the Great War. There I went through an intensive war course for six months, and, becoming an Under Officer, was kept on to help train others for a further six months. We did not study the usual academic subjects taught at Sandhurst in peace-time, so that for all practical purposes my academic education ceased when I was seventeen. This I had always regretted and there was a gap in my life which it seemed I could never make up. But reading Law for two or three years at the age of thirty-four did make up to some extent for this gap. I found the reading itself intensely interesting, and it helped me to think logically and to express myself more clearly and more concisely.

I was still out of Parliament when I was called to the Bar and I naturally thought about putting this qualification to practical effect. I therefore went to listen to a number of court cases, and made a number of enquiries amongst my friends as to whether it would be possible for me as a blind man to practise as a barrister.

The conclusion I came to was that it would be possible for a blind man to practise with success, but that it would be very difficult. If he were to adopt the rôle of Counsel in Chambers giving advice to solicitors on conveyancing or other matters, he would have an immense amount of reading matter which would be very slow and tedious, and drafting would be much more difficult by means of dictation through a secretary than if you could see the papers yourself. However, this would not be impossible, and if the blind man studied some particularly narrow and abstruse branch of law, he might make himself a considerable expert in a narrow field and might do quite well. But this would not have interested me ; I don't think I should have liked the extremely arduous and dull work. The ordinary rough-and-tumble of court work would also be very difficult for a blind man. He might have to go into a number of different courts ; he would find physical difficulties in knowing his way about, and he might be landed with some question from the Judge or from opposing Counsel which he could not very well deal with without looking at his papers. It would be much easier for an established leader at the Bar to continue without his sight than for a youngster to make a beginning.

However, I came to the conclusion that here again there might be some narrow limited branch of law, such as, for example, the Divorce Court, in which a blind man could practise. There is in this court a more or less regular routine; there are very few leading cases to which reference has to be made, so few that he could remember them all after a bit of practice, and I came to the conclusion that this would have been possible. But this did not attract me very much either, and in 1931, while I was debating these matters and coming to no particular conclusion, I found myself back in the House of Commons.

13

B.B.C.

It is not my intention to discuss the politics of the last ten or twenty years, but rather to confine myself to my own humble personal experiences. Nevertheless a word about the 1931 and 1935 elections may be of interest. In 1931 there had been great fear in the land : fear that our currency might go bad, that the nation was overspending and might become bankrupt, and that unemployment, already devastating, might become worse. The result was a tremendous swing to the Right so that the National Government, based mainly on a Conservative foundation, came in with a swinging majority. I regained North St. Pancras by over ten thousand votes, whereas only two years before I had been beaten by over three thousand votes. In 1935 a curious thing happened. Although the country had recovered very materially from the great slump, and although conditions were better as regards unemployment and wages, and there had been considerable developments in the social services, nevertheless the Government came back with a smaller majority, and each of us individually in our constituencies received smaller majorities. My majority, for example, dropped to round about three thousand.

It is, of course, only since the Great War that we have been a full democracy with votes for all adults. Indeed it was not until the 1920's that the young women got the vote, making adult suffrage complete. Twenty years is too short a time to judge, but I have formed a theory about elections which I set down for what it is worth. When trade is bad and unemployment is high electors seem to vote for a Conservative Government, or for a National Government, of which the Conservatives are the main element. As things get better and unemployment decreases and wages rise, and social conditions become more generous, the electors vote for the Left. I do not know why this is, unless it be that when

things are bad they want security and believe that traditional methods and the capitalist system can provide a revival, whereas when things are good they think that experiments can be made and new methods tried without so much danger. Perhaps it's largely the women who influence the change ; perhaps when things are not so bad the women allow their husbands to indulge their fancies, whereas when things are really bad they turn to old-fashioned remedies such as thrift, caution, and good housekeeping in national affairs.

The year 1936 was an eventful one. That was the year in which the National Government embarked upon its re-armament policy. If I remember rightly, one thousand five hundred millions was voted for this purpose. It seemed a great sum in those days. Perhaps it was as much as could be voted in that one year for rearmament without adversely affecting our economic system. If there was any fault, it was not so much as to the inadequacy of this first effort, but that in the later years of 1937–1938 and 1939 we did not accelerate our production. Reading the signs as best I could in Germany and Italy, I began to feel that war was likely, and I began to be greatly influenced by Mr. Churchill's warnings. With these in mind I took the rather exceptional step at my age of resigning my seat in the House of Commons and accepting appointment as a Governor of the British Broadcasting Corporation. I thought that I might do useful work in helping the Corporation to prepare for war, and that if war came I might find the taking of a share in the direction of this very important agency a useful and suitable war job. I could not go back to the Army, but here was something that I was extremely interested in, and which I could do.

As it turned out, I made a mistake to leave the House of Commons, for I missed it very much indeed. It is strange how often in life you do not really appreciate a thing until you have lost it. I enjoyed greatly my two and a half years as a Governor of the B.B.C. It was to me a new interest. I met many charming and intelligent people and I was able to share a great variety of responsibilities, many of them new to me.

I was able to urge upon the Board of the B.B.C. the

desirability of strengthening our power for broadcasting to different parts of the world, but I did not succeed in one or two attempts I made to get Mr. Churchill invited personally to broadcast his warnings.

The political parties were a little timid about broadcasting. There was an arrangement whereby at election times and occasionally between elections speeches would be made by leaders of the three parties in due order, with a fair allocation of time. But it was not possible to secure agreement for elder statesmen outside the recognised parties to come to the microphone and express their views. I think this was a weakness of broadcasting, and that in peace-time at any rate the microphone ought to be made available to any persons outstanding and experienced to make their contribution to public policy, even if it is controversial.

Talking about controversy reminds me that I wrote the two or three paragraphs in the report of the Committee on Broadcasting which sat under the chairmanship of Lord Crawford in 1925. Reading them now they seem rather modest, but it must be remembered that as long ago as 1925 broadcasting was a very new art, politicians had not yet learned its power, many were afraid of it, and the newspapers were anxious that its sphere should be as limited as possible. This is how the paragraphs read :

> Broadcasting Controversial Matter.—We are unable to lay down a precise line of policy or to assess the degree to which argument can be safely transmitted. In the absence of authoritative evidence such advice would be premature. But, speaking generally, we believe that if the material be of high quality, not too lengthy or insistent, and distributed with scrupulous fairness, licencees will desire a moderate amount of controversy. But the discretion of the new authority must be upheld. Provided the Commission is strong and impartial, it will gradually assess the nature and the extent of the demand ; in this and in other problems to be solved the Commissioners will do well at the outset to act with firm and consistent circumspection.
>
> Broadcasting Parliamentary speeches, though parallel, raises a different group of issues, on which we do not feel authorised to offer an opinion.

I suppose I had been appointed to the Crawford Com-

mittee because I had asked a number of questions in Parliament about broadcasting. I think I was the first Member of Parliament to take an interest in the political power of broadcasting. This was my first Parliamentary Committee and I found it a very interesting experience. I was the only Conservative House of Commons man on the Committee. The Liberal Party was represented by the Rt. Hon. Ian Macpherson, K.C., M.P., and the Labour Party by the Rt. Hon. Wm. Graham, M.P. Other members were Mr. Rudyard Kipling; the Rt. Hon. Lord Blanesburgh, G.B.E.; Sir William Hadow, C.B.E.; the Rt. Hon. Lord Rayleigh, F.R.S.; Sir Thomas Royden, Bart., C.H.; Dame Meriel Talbot, D.B.E.

The terms of reference of the Committee were: "To advise as to the proper scope of the Broadcasting service and as to the management, control, and finance thereof after the expiry of the existing licence on 31st December 1926. The Committee will indicate what changes in the law, if any, are desirable in the interests of the Broadcasting service."

It was a great education to me to see the skill of the Chairman, the knowledge and intelligence and experience of the members of the Committee, and the capable way in which the civil servants who acted as secretaries helped us with our work.

Our principal recommendation was that the British Broadcasting Corporation should be set up to take the place of the old British Broadcasting Company. This was a very important step, creating a new kind of public body under public control and yet divorced from the ordinary Civil Service departmental management. It may well be that the B.B.C., which has operated not unsuccessfully for fifteen years, for the greater part of the time under the inspiration and guidance of Lord Reith, will be a model for other corporations of the kind, to take charge of great enterprises of a monopolistic nature. Indeed while I have been in Parliament we have set up the London Passenger Transport Board, British Overseas Airways, and the Central Electricity Board which set up and operates the Grid system.

My interest in broadcasting in its political application and in the field of entertainment and education really arose

out of an early technical interest. As a boy of sixteen at school I had set up a simple crystal receiver, as far back as 1912 and 1913, and used to receive News Bulletins in Morse from the Eiffel Tower. We used to get a tube of cardboard from the linoleum salesman and wind around it many hundreds of feet of enamel-covered copper wire. In the carpentry shop at school we did the necessary wood and brass work, and thus made the crudest kind of tuner. From the Stinks Laboratory at school we scrounged—or I suppose "pinched" would be the word in those days—a piece of copper pyrites, or of some other crystal, and from Gamages' we bought a pair of earphones, or if we were rather hard up, a single earphone. But crude as this apparatus was, we were able to receive wireless signals from the Eiffel Tower and from other stations, and we thought we were great scientists.

During the war of 1914–1918 I specialised in signals and became a Signals officer, but I never got as far as wireless, because the time came for me to go back to my regiment and over to France for the Somme battle. Soon after the war, however, I revived my interest and took up wireless again as a hobby. At this time I became very keen on constructional work, and had a workshop of my own in which I did some carpentry and made simple wireless receivers, and did various repairs to the electric lighting and the doors and bolts and washers in the house. When my daughter Jean was born I placed a microphone in her cot and a loud-speaker in the sitting-room, so that we could enjoy our evenings without anxiety, sure in the knowledge that the least cry would be transmitted to us. I recommend every blind man, and perhaps every other man, to learn to use a few tools and to keep them in the house. They are a great resource, as well as very useful. I bought an old metal-cutting lathe, and had this adapted for cutting wood. I had the saddles so arranged that I could fix pegs at various points in them to limit the travel of the cutting tools. I had various cutting tools, of different shapes, and by a little care and ingenuity I was able to turn a great many articles in wood, such as candlesticks and lampstands, and tobacco jars and fruit bowls, and so on.

Often in the evenings I would go up to my workshop and

spend some hours at my carpentry or listening to Morse on the wireless, and shortly we approached one of the most exciting phases of this art. Suddenly we heard speech coming out of the air or the ether, instead of mere Morse signals. This was a thrill, and the number of amateurs like myself who began to listen to these signals multiplied enormously. The pre-war scientific society of wireless experimenters developed rapidly and its membership grew all over the country until the Radio Society of Great Britain, as it was called, had some thousands of members. And instead of merely listening we took to transmitting ourselves. I became a very keen amateur transmitter, and used to sit up to all hours of the morning sending and exchanging messages with other amateurs in France and Italy and Alsace-Lorraine, and even the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. I don't remember personally conducting any exchanges with transmitters in Germany; whether this was because they were not allowed, or because they had not developed an amateur movement, I do not know; but I still have in my possession cards and reports as to the many messages we transmitted overseas. The astonishing thing was the extremely small power which we were allowed to use and did use. I can remember transmitting across the Atlantic on a little transmitting set which used no more electrical power than would be consumed by an extremely small electric radiator.

Many of these early amateurs went into radio seriously and became radio engineers, some of them occupying important positions in later years. Others merely amused themselves and taught themselves something of the technicalities of wireless. I became president of this Society later on, and did my best to secure concessions from the Government to allow them to operate as freely as possible. Utilising the station of one of our members which was much more developed than most, we initiated the first radio broadcast to Australia from the mother country, and I conducted a vigorous press attack in the *Morning Post* on the B.B.C. for allowing amateurs to undertake this work instead of doing it themselves. The B.B.C. answered that they could not undertake

a service until the art had developed sufficiently for them to make it a regular and reliable service. But the Dutch and the Americans had already started experimental services, and the pressure of events, including our modest protest, had its effect and so the Empire service of the B.B.C. was born.

Then I entered the House of Commons and my evenings were fully occupied, and I had to give up my workshop and my wireless transmitter, much to my regret. I think a strong amateur movement is a very good thing for the country, and I hope that after this war our Post Office and other wireless authorities will be wise enough to allow young fellows with an experimental turn of mind, and old ones as well perhaps, a certain measure of freedom to use such wave-lengths as can be spared and carry on their experimental work.

I had many friends on the technical side of broadcasting, and I kept in touch with them and gradually acquired some knowledge of the problems of this new medium. In the next ten years I visited the United States more than once, and each of the Dominions, and called to see the various broadcasting authorities. I was not an engineer or a broadcaster in the strict sense of either term, but I had a fair background of knowledge of broadcasting at home and throughout the world, and I have no doubt that this consistent interest was the direct cause of my eventually becoming a member of the Board of Governors of the B.B.C.

Some people say they have all the luck, others say they have none. I am quite sure there is such a thing as luck, but I am equally sure that you've got to know what kind of luck you want, and be on the look-out for it, otherwise it will pass you by. To know what you want and to be prepared consistently to have it in mind and look out for the chance of getting it, perhaps over a long period of years, is very important if you want to get on.

I wanted to become a Governor of the B.B.C. and I was very delighted when I received the invitation. But when in September 1939, after the war had been going on for two or three weeks, I and most of my colleagues on the Board of the Corporation were forced to give in our resignations, it looked as if I had made a big mistake. I was out of the House of

Commons, out of the B.B.C., and I had no really belligerent war job which would satisfy me. But by the middle of 1940 I was in Parliament again, and in the spring of 1941 was a Governor of the B.B.C. again, which serves to show that you must never give up striving for the things you want. I don't mean to imply that you'll always get what you want, but I do mean to say that you will not get things unless you consciously want them and work for them.

This forced resignation of the Governors of the B.B.C. has no importance whatever so far as I or any others of the Governors personally were concerned. A bit of bad luck for a few individuals is a matter of no great importance, but the incident has a very great political significance and I therefore propose to devote some paragraphs to explaining the matter.

Lord Crawford's Committee had unanimously recommended that a commission or corporation should be set up on the lines of the present B.B.C. It should have a Board of Governors who would not themselves be individual representatives of any interest, but who would collectively represent the national interest. They were to control the service and to be responsible for every aspect of it. In certain technical matters and in a state of emergency or war Government would have certain rights of control, but it was important that the independence of the Board of Governors should be maintained. Broadcasting was to be a monopoly, there was only to be one corporation, and it followed that the relationship of this corporation to Parliament and the newspapers and the public was a very important one. It should be fair and it should seem to be fair. It was a necessary convenience that the Crown on the recommendation of the Government of the day should appoint the Governors, but this was not to mean that the Board was part of the Government of the day, or that it was to take its orders from the Government of the day. It was a safeguard against the arbitrary use of broadcasting by the Government of the day for its own benefit that the Governors should themselves be men or women of some standing and independence. Parliament endorsed this plan, and ten years later another

Committee under Lord Ullswater recommended a continuance of the corporation and Parliament again endorsed the principles involved, adding that the number of Governors should be increased from five to seven, presumably to strengthen their independence and make them even more representative.

As the war approached it was the duty of those in authority to make plans, and a plan was made whereby the independent Board of the B.B.C. should cease to exist. It was arranged that by an Order in Council, which would become operative under war emergency legislation, the independent Board of the B.B.C. would be dismissed, and the work of the Corporation would be carried on by officials receiving direct orders from the Government department concerned, which was to be the new Ministry of Information. It is easy to see how this arrangement commended itself to those who felt themselves to be responsible for this aspect of public information and propaganda. No doubt they argued that the war would be a lightning attack upon London, that public services would be disorganised, and that it would be necessary for the Government to have under its direct control this important agency for instructing and informing the people how to behave, and telling them what to do in the event of air raids, and so on. The proposal may have seemed to them to be very reasonable and proper at the time and in the circumstances, and the time and the circumstances were exactly those in which it was extremely difficult for the Board of Governors themselves to resist such an encroachment.

I initiated the most vigorous protest, and my colleagues on the Board of Governors joined me in taking this protest to the authorities. We pointed out that we had been set up by Royal Charter by the express will of Parliament, and that our independence ought not to be taken away from us without the express will of Parliament. We won this important constitutional victory, and as a result of our protest the Board of Governors was left in being, though as a concession to the view—I think a false one—that it would make its work more expeditious, the Board was reduced from seven to two, the

Chairman and the Vice-Chairman remaining in office and constituting the Board.

As I have said, we had won a constitutional victory, though the result was not very satisfactory. Nevertheless we, as individuals, felt we could do no more about it, for had we made any further or public protests it would have looked as if we were caring about our own jobs. Accordingly the Governors accepted this settlement and five of us left with good will and good grace, and the B.B.C. went into the war and did a remarkably good job of work. The technical change-over from peace-time to a method of transmission during war-time which would not give aid to enemy aircraft was accomplished in a couple of hours, and from that day to this on the technical side the B.B.C. has done wonders. It has never been off the air for a minute, and the quality of its transmission has improved materially as the war has progressed. Its power to strike at the enemy's mind in Europe has increased, its languages have been multiplied until it talks in almost every tongue, and its power to carry the message of encouragement and hope from the mother country to the ends of the earth has been multiplied enormously. Much credit is due to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman who carried on the B.B.C. and to its principal officers.

But as we expected, they were bound to come in for public criticism. The war-time service at its best was a poor substitute in the early weeks and months for the full peace-time service, and just as Cleopatra prepared boiling oil for the messenger who brought her bad tidings, so the British public began to criticise the B.B.C. News Bulletins more and more as the news got worse. The artists who were not employed as frequently as before, and the Members of Parliament who felt they had a message to deliver over the wireless but could not all be fitted in, and the newspapers who always loved to have a go at the B.B.C., joined in a crescendo of criticism. Questions were asked in Parliament and debates were held, and eventually a change had to be made. The Government was faced with the alternative of taking the service over completely lock, stock, and barrel, so that the Minister of Informa-

tion himself would be known to be, and would be, held responsible by Parliament for everything that happened, or alternatively to reconstitute the Board on the old lines recommended by the Crawford Committee as an independent and extra-governmental body.

The Government chose the latter course, and to complete the story I set down the announcement made by Mr. Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information, in reply to a question in the House on 2nd April 1941, when he re-established the Board :

The Prime Minister has authorised me to say that the King has been pleased to approve the reconstitution of the Board of Governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the numbers of which were reduced to two at the outbreak of war, as follows : The two serving members, Sir Allan Powell and Mr. C. H. G. Millis, have at the request of the Government consented to continue in office. The following have been invited and have consented to join the Board : The hon. and gallant Member for Lonsdale (Sir I. Fraser), Mr. J. J. Mallon, Mr. Arthur Mann, and Lady Violet Bonham-Carter.

In reply to a supplementary question, as follows : " In view of that very reassuring reply, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether, within the reasonable restrictions of war, this enlightened Board of Governors will be allowed to exercise genuine freedom ? " the Minister replied : " Yes, sir, certainly."

I also set down a further announcement made by Mr. Brendan Bracken, the present Minister of Information, on 23rd October 1941, when he was affirming to Parliament the independent nature of the Board of Governors :

Some misunderstanding appears to have arisen regarding the effect of the recent changes in the Overseas Division of the B.B.C. upon the status of the Corporation as a whole and of the Governors in particular. The Governors act as trustees to the public and Parliament for the maintenance of the integrity and high standards of British broadcasting. They have always recognised that in wartime it is necessary and right that the Government should control the policy of the B.B.C. in matters affecting the war effort, the publication of news, and the conduct of propaganda. Subject to this measure of control, the Governors, in addition to their responsibilities as trustees, remain in charge of the administration and technical services of the Corporation, and of the expenditure of the moneys voted to it by this House.

Thus it will be seen that during the term of life of the B.B.C. as a result of the recommendations of two powerful Committees and at least three Cabinet decisions, the House of Commons has on a number of occasions affirmed its wish that broadcasting should not be part of a Government department, but should be controlled as far as possible by an independent Board of Governors responsible to Parliament and public for the integrity of the service. I have dealt with this story at some length because if we are to protect our democracy against the arbitrary use, by any Government, of broadcasting, that is to say from a dictatorship of the air, Parliament must be vigilant to see that whatever individual changes are made in the personnel of the Governors, the Board of Governors itself is supported and is not in any emergency removed without Parliament's knowledge and consent.

I have said a word earlier in this chapter about luck. In April 1940 a vacancy had occurred in the constituency known as the Lonsdale Division of Lancaster, due to the death of the Earl of Crawford and the succession of his son Lord Balniel to his father's title and seat in the House of Lords. I had had the good fortune to be selected as Conservative candidate by the Lonsdale Unionist Association. So I became their Member of Parliament. I thought to myself, " Well, I am very glad to be back in the House. And that is the end of any possible connection I may have with the B.B.C., even if, as I believe will happen, the Board of Governors is reconstituted. Never mind, I am glad to be back in the House, and I enjoyed being on the B.B.C." And I wrote it off in my mind.

I had not been back in the House more than a few months when the situation which I had long expected arose, and the Government had to consider the re-establishment of the Board of Governors. I took an interest in this, but not the personal interest which I might have taken had I felt that I might be considered for reappointment. But as far as I was concerned the old rule applied, namely, that the office of a Governor of the B.B.C. is an office of profit under the Crown and cannot be held by a Member of Parliament.

Then occurred what, so far as I was concerned, was an

extraordinary coincidence or piece of luck. The Government discovered that there were a number of Members of Parliament who were holding offices of various kinds ; there were High Commissioners, there were Members serving in various Government departments as advisers or executives on special jobs. They had gone into these war-time posts in order to help in the war effort, and without realising that they were offending against the rule that they must not take an office under the Crown while they were still Members of Parliament; probably many of them had actually offended against old Acts of Parliament and were liable for severe penalties. But they were doing useful jobs and it was therefore necessary to put their position right.

So Parliament passed the House of Commons Disqualification (Temporary Provisions) Act, and under this Act it was possible for the Prime Minister to give a certificate that a Member's office under the Crown was relevant to the war effort, and if such a certificate was approved by Parliament he could then hold the job and still remain a Member. And so I was reappointed to the Board of the B.B.C. and yet remained in the House. The form of the certificate is interesting—here is an extract from *The Times* newspaper of 26th April 1941 :

M.P.'S WAR-TIME OFFICES

First Two Certificates

The Prime Minister has presented to the House of Commons the first certificates under the new House of Commons Disqualification (Temporary Provisions) Act. This Act provides that if the Prime Minister certifies that the appointment of any Member of the House to an office or place of profit under the Crown is required in the public interest for purposes connected with the prosecution of the war, the Member so appointed shall be able to retain his seat.

Certificates have been presented in respect of Sir Ian Fraser, recently reappointed a Governor of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, the United Kingdom Government's new High Commissioner in Canada. Sir Ian Fraser, who is given the first certificate under the new Act, had to resign his seat in Parliament when he was first appointed a Governor of the B.B.C. in 1936. He is now Conservative Member for Lonsdale, and Mr. MacDonald is National Labour Member for Ross and Cromarty.

The form of the certificate given by the Prime Minister (to cite that relating to Mr. MacDonald's appointment) is as follows: "That the appointment of the Right Honourable Malcolm MacDonald, a Member of the Commons House of Parliament, to be High Commissioner in Canada for his Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom is required in the public interest for purposes connected with the prosecution of the present war".

The reader who is not conversant with constitutional law and theory may wonder why an Act of Parliament is required to enable an M.P. to hold an office of profit under the Crown. Surely, he will think, it is a good thing especially in war-time that Members should help to carry on these various public services; and so it is up to a point. But if all Members of Parliament could be employed by Government there would, in theory at any rate, be a possibility that the Government's hold on the House of Commons would become far too great, and that legitimate criticism, and opposition when it was necessary, would be stifled. Parliament is rightly very jealous of the independence of its Members and that is the reason why this special arrangement had to be made, and why as a matter of fact the number of Members who might receive the Prime Minister's certificate was subsequently limited to twenty-five.

Parliament and the Lonsdale Division of Lancaster, St. Dunstan's, which is still nearest to my heart, and to which I devote some time every day, the B.B.C., and my various companies, give me a very full and a very interesting life. An entirely new interest has been added by the nature of my present constituency. That is an interest in farming and in all those who earn their living on or by the land. The character of my new constituency is that of a country constituency, five hundred square miles in extent, composed of three or four towns and a vast number of small villages. I was brought up in the vast open spaces of South Africa; I spent my boyhood in the Dorsetshire country; I have a great love for the land and the people who live and work on it, and it is one of my greatest pleasures now to find myself representing a constituency where the dominant interest is in the land.

England's land has been greatly neglected, to the detriment of her people and of her national strength. The landowner, the farmer, and the farm worker were left to fend for themselves and their industry allowed to go into decay. The towns didn't care. Now when the towns are threatened by hunger in war they realise the importance of their land, and Parliament, representing truly the national will, has given many facilities and advantages to the countryside which have caused something of a revival. Farmers are making a little money, farm workers are getting a reasonable wage. Those who represent the land in Parliament must see to it that British Agriculture is not let down after the war.

THE END

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Fraser, Ian.

Wheras I was blind.

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